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**The Role of Music in Selected Novels and Associated  
Writings of Alejo Carpentier: Primeval Expression,  
Structural Analogies and Performance**

**Katia Chornik**

Doctoral thesis

The Open University

Music and English Departments

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## Abstract

Alejo Carpentier's extensive use of music in fiction is interdisciplinary by its very nature and thus begs for consideration by scholars working across both disciplines. However, it has been mainly analysed by literary critics with insufficient or inadequate understanding of music. This thesis aims to fill this gap. The Introduction explains the selection of texts, establishes methodologies and sources, and contextualises the thesis within relevant Carpentier scholarship and related interdisciplinary studies in literature and music. Chapter Two deals with a newly discovered unpublished source, Carpentier's 'Los orígenes de la música y la música primitiva' ('The Origins of Music and Primitive Music'). It scrutinises the ways by which the author assimilates, resists and challenges evolutionary ideas used in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century anthropological and musicological literature. Chapter Three examines Carpentier's novel *Los pasos perdidos* (*The Lost Steps*) in the light of 'Los orígenes de la música', focusing on the enterprise of collecting 'primitive' instruments, the discussion of the origins of music, the use of primeval expression for contemporary music and the juxtaposition of conflicting models of time. Chapter Four discusses Carpentier's experiments with musical time and musical form in the novella *El acoso* (*The Chase*). Using a previously unexamined radio programme by Carpentier as a starting point, it establishes how the author uses musical form as a literary model and determines the influence of his broadcasting experience upon the novella's play on musical timeframes. After music as formative and music as form, comes an examination of music as performed. Focusing on the performances narrated in *El acoso* and *La consagración de la primavera* (*The Rite of Spring*), Chapter Five examines how music is employed to convey irony and political ideology, and the incongruities that result from these connections. Chapter Six concludes the thesis and suggests avenues for future research.

## Acknowledgments

I shall first thank my paternal grandmother Ana Aberbuch, who introduced me to the work of Alejo Carpentier. Reading his novels over and over was one of her most fulfilling activities. She spoke with such passion about his works that I had no other option than to start exploring them. I was about thirteen when I first attempted reading *Los pasos perdidos*. I struggled to follow those extremely long sentences, awkward references and rare words. With the help of several dictionaries and encyclopaedias, I managed to get through the first few chapters. To my grandmother's disappointment, I decided it was better to postpone my study of Carpentier's work for some time. Two decades later, Carpentier's writings feel no less challenging... My interest in music is also due to my grandmother, who was among the first women to become professional musicians in Chile. I inherited her violin when I was a young child. That beautiful instrument and her professional example motivated me to become a musician. I am not sure how she would have reacted to my resolution to stop my career as a violinist in order to pursue research. But I am sure she would have loved to read this thesis, which is dedicated to her.

Considering my background and the nature of my doctoral research proposal, I needed supervision in a number of areas to fill gaps in my knowledge of literature and also to acquire the necessary tools to pursue multi-disciplinary research. This was given by The Open University from the outset, for which I am extremely grateful. I also thank the OU for the scholarship provided for the duration of my studies, and additional funding for my research trip to Cuba in 2008.

I sincerely thank my internal supervisors, Delia da Sousa Correa of the English Department and Robert Samuels of the Music Department, for their guidance and support. Their extensive cross-discipline research and teaching experience benefited

both the overall conception of my thesis and key aspects of my research. In particular, da Sousa Correa's work on music and evolutionary thought in English literature and the relationship between science, literature and music in the nineteenth century was crucial to my analysis of Carpentier's discussions of the origins of music. For my chapter on the author's parallels with musical form, it was invaluable to draw upon Samuels' knowledge of musical analysis.

I am indebted to my external supervisor, Anke Birkenmaier of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at Indiana University, for her excellent advice, particularly on sources and developments in studies of Carpentier's work. I will always be grateful for her immense commitment, support and generosity, which have been truly exemplary.

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scholars. Special thanks to librarians Araceli García Carranza and Iliana Ortiz, for their expert help and friendship. Sincere thanks are also due to Helen Clough, arts librarian at The Open University, for her most efficient help with bibliographical resources. I am grateful to my friend Aquiles Alencar Brayner, curator of the British Library's Latin American Collections, for his encouraging comments and help with research sources.

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## I. Introduction

The year 2010 marks the thirtieth anniversary of the death of the Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier, one of the major figures in Latin American culture. He coined the concept of 'lo real maravilloso' [the real marvellous], exerting a crucial influence on the writers belonging to the so-called Latin American Boom. Carpentier was musically educated and used music in literature to a greater extent than any other Latin American writer of his time. He worked with music from other perspectives, as a musicologist, music journalist, concert promoter, librettist and radio producer.<sup>1</sup>

Born in Switzerland in 1904 to French and Russian parents, Carpentier spent his childhood between Cuba and France. He enrolled as an architecture student at the University of Havana but soon gave up, starting a career in journalism. He lived in France between 1928 and 1939 and in Venezuela between 1945 and 1959. Following the Cuban Revolution he took on several official posts, including Vice-President of the National Culture Council, Executive Director of the National Publishing House, Member of the National Assembly and Minister-Counsellor at the Cuban Embassy in France. He won the Premio Miguel de Cervantes (Spain, 1977), the Prix du Meilleur Livre Étranger for his novel *Los pasos perdidos* (France, 1956), the Prix Mondial Cino

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<sup>1</sup> Carpentier even composed works for piano and chamber orchestra when he was a teenager. He later reflected that those failed experiments helped him define his literary vocation:

[Mis composiciones] eran un poco impresionistas, entre Ravel, Debussy, con algunas durezas adquiridas al leer a Stravinsky, a Milhaud y otros: pensé entonces que en realidad no eran muy buenas. En aquel momento, pues, sentí definitivamente mi vocación literaria y así comencé a escribir.

[My compositions] were a bit impressionist, between Ravel, Debussy, with a certain hardness acquired after reading Stravinsky, Milhaud and others. I thought then that they were not actually very good. So at that moment, I definitely felt my literary vocation and began to write.

'Entrevista en Radio Televisión Francesa' (1963), in *Entrevistas: Alejo Carpentier*, ed. by Virgilio López Lemus (Havana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1985), pp. 72-97 (p. 75). This translation is my own. Unless specified, all English translations of texts which are not available in print are mine. On occasions, I have amended the published English versions of Carpentier's novels, and this is indicated in square brackets. When sources by foreign authors other than Carpentier are available in English, I do not include the original versions.

del Duca (France, 1975), the Premio Internacional Alfonso Reyes (Mexico, 1975) and the Prix Médicis Étranger (France, 1979), among other literary awards.

Carpentier's extensive use of music in fiction is interdisciplinary by its very nature and thus begs for consideration by scholars working across both disciplines. However, it has been mainly analysed by literary critics with insufficient or inadequate understanding of the musical materials linked to the literary texts. At the time of the submission of this thesis, no substantial cross-disciplinary study of the role of music in Carpentier's novels has been published in English. My doctoral research attempts to fill this gap.

### **Selection of texts and key issues of the thesis**

The thesis focuses on an essay and three novels by Carpentier: 'Los orígenes de la música y la música primitiva', *Los pasos perdidos* (1953), *El acoso* (1956) and *La consagración de la primavera* (1978). 'Los orígenes de la música y la música primitiva' is an unpublished and undated typescript I discovered in Havana in 2008. I believe Carpentier wrote this text shortly after visiting Haiti in 1943, as in it he refers to 'mi reciente viaje a la vecina república' [my recent trip to the neighbouring republic].<sup>2</sup> This hitherto unknown text is fundamental to my discussion of the author's quest for primeval musical expression. Among the various literary works in which he incorporated his ethnological interests, *Los pasos perdidos* is the novel that appears most directly related to 'Los orígenes de la música'. Previous scholarship has not paid significant attention to the dramatisation of theories on the origin and development of

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<sup>2</sup> 'Los orígenes de la música y la música primitiva' (c.1943), Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, Colección Carpentier, CM 52, p. 16. My own transcript and translation of this text are in the Appendix. My field work in Havana was limited by several factors. Access to the collection of Carpentier's unpublished documents was restricted to a few hours a week. Its card catalogue did not seem to follow a particular rationale, making the searching process challenging. Thus, I had to concentrate my efforts on studying a small number of texts. I would have liked to examine documents held by the Fundación Carpentier and the Museo Nacional de la Música. Unfortunately both institutions were closed for refurbishment.

music in this novel. However, there are substantial critical studies that explore Carpentier's incorporation of his ethnological interests and the idea of 'the primitive' in *¡Écue-Yamba-Ó!* (1933) and *El reino de este mundo* (1949).

My discussion of Carpentier's structural analogies with music focuses solely on *El acoso*, as there is no convincing evidence that the author deliberately attempted these parallels in other literary works.<sup>3</sup> Key to my argument about performance are Carpentier's references to political issues linked to canonical musical compositions. *El acoso* and *La consagración de la primavera*, both centred on well-known pieces, illustrate this aspect aptly. The role of music performance in these two novels has been underexplored by critics.

Chapters Two and Three of this thesis examine Carpentier's dealings with 'primitive' music and evolutionary concepts. The notion of 'the primitive' originated in ancient times and was widely used by scholars working in various disciplines until the early twentieth century.<sup>4</sup> One of the most influential texts dealing with so-called primitive thinking was Lucien Lévy-Brühl's *La mentalité primitive* (1922), which Carpentier most likely read following his interest in anthropology and collaborations with *Documents* and *Bifur*, two French magazines dealing with ethnology and surrealism.<sup>5</sup>

My analysis demonstrates that 'Los orígenes de la música y la música primitiva' elaborates ideas which were later to become the groundwork for the discussions on the

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<sup>3</sup> According to Claude Fell, Carpentier stated that his novel *El siglo de las luces* (1962) 'est construit comme une sonate en trois parties' [is constructed as a sonata in three parts]. Claude Fell, 'Rencontre avec Alejo Carpentier', *Les Langues Modernes*, 59 (1965), 357-64 (p. 362). However, in his numerous interviews and critical works in which he discusses his novels, Carpentier only mentions *El acoso* as having a musical form.

<sup>4</sup> For a wide-scope survey of the use of the concept of 'the primitive' in various cultures and historical periods, see Stanley Diamond, *In Search of the Primitive: A Critique of Civilization*, 2nd edn (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1981 [1974]). Musicologists' heavy use of this notion is explored by Bennett Zon, 'Disorienting Race: Humanizing the Musical Savage and the Rise of British Ethnomusicology', *Nineteenth-Century Music Review*, 3 (2006), 25-43.

<sup>5</sup> See Carpentier's articles 'Lettre des Antilles', *Bifur*, 3 (1929), 91-105, and 'La musique cubaine' (1929), in *Documents* (Paris: Editions Jean-Michel Place, 1991), pp. 324-27.

origins of music narrated in *Los pasos perdidos*. In both texts, Carpentier proposes that speech and music emerged simultaneously in human evolution, and seeks the origin of music in rhythmic instinct. He incorporates the paradigm of cultural evolution, making extensive use of the nineteenth-century analogy between prehistoric humanity and current-day 'primitive' peoples. Carpentier also adheres to some of the concepts and methods of comparative musicology (which made use of evolutionary models), stressing the potential of primeval music for Western researchers and composers. The presence of these ideas in Carpentier's accounts is not surprising, given that Darwinism was widely disseminated in Latin America from the nineteenth century onwards.<sup>6</sup> However, the impact of evolutionary ideas on Carpentier's thinking and the ways by which he manipulates them in his fiction have not been studied before.

Carpentier refers to the notion of evolution not only when discussing primeval culture but also in relation to technical developments in literature and music, as recorded in an interview published by *Nuestro Tiempo* in 1958:

Incumbe al escritor la tarea de hacer evolucionar las técnicas narrativas, como incumbe al compositor la de hacer evolucionar las técnicas de la composición.<sup>7</sup>

It is the writer's responsibility to make narrative techniques evolve, just as it is the composer's task to evolve composition techniques.

Carpentier's taste for innovation resulted in the experimental structures of his novella *El acoso* (1956) and some of the short stories of *Guerra del tiempo* (1958).<sup>8</sup> In *El acoso*,

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<sup>6</sup> Carpentier himself declared that Darwin's *The Origin of the Species* (1859) was one of the texts that most influenced his thinking. 'Carta No. 5', dated 2 August 1974, in *Cartas de Carpentier*, ed. by Roberto González Echevarría (Madrid: Verbum, 2008), pp. 65-79 (pp. 72-73). This edition includes seventeen letters from Carpentier to González Echevarría, nine letters from González Echevarría to Carpentier, and the transcript of a recorded conversation between them. Carpentier explicitly mentions Darwin in other writings, including 'El hombre anterior al hombre' (1958), in *Los confines del hombre*, Obras Completas Series, 16 vols (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1983-94), XVI (1994), 16-18; 'Lo barroco y lo real maravilloso' (1975), in *Ensayos* (see Obras Completas Series, above), XIII (1990), 167-93 (p. 91); 'Cuatro siglos de cultura cubana' (1976), in *Conferencias* (see Obras Completas Series, above), XIV (1991), 180-205 (p. 190); and 'Elogio y reivindicación del libro' (1972), in *Conferencias* (see Obras Completas Series, above), XIV (1991), 352-60 (p. 358).

<sup>7</sup> 'A preguntas de *Nuestro Tiempo* cinco respuestas de Alejo Carpentier' (1958), in *Entrevistas: Alejo Carpentier*, ed. by Virgilio López Lemus (Havana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1985), pp. 48-52 (p. 50).

Carpentier set himself to imitate musical form and timings, deliberately directing readers to these parallels. In Chapter Four, I elucidate ways by which the author integrates formal and temporal musical models into the construction of this novella, and parallels a musical timeframe with the time it takes to read the action of the novella. Drawing on a previously unexamined radio lecture by Carpentier, on his broadcasting experience and on existing recorded performances of Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony, I arrive at different conclusions from previous studies.

Music performance has a prominent presence in Carpentier's work. His novels depict a wide range of music performance situations: concerts, operatic functions, recordings and broadcasts, as well as traditional indigenous rituals. Vicky Unruh scrutinises different types of artistic performances portrayed in a number of fictional works by Carpentier but not in *El acoso* and in *La consagración de la primavera* (1978) (see 'Previous scholarship' section below). My own analysis in Chapter Five focuses on musical performances in these two novels (for the purpose of my examination, I understand music performance simply as the act of making or reproducing music<sup>9</sup>). In particular, I explore Carpentier's use of performance as a locus for conveying irony (for my purposes, I borrow Chris Baldick's definition of irony, 'A subtly humorous perception of inconsistency, in which an apparently straightforward statement or event is undermined by its context so as to give it a very different significance'<sup>10</sup>). Carpentier

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<sup>8</sup> These experiments may be related to other literary and musical works of that time, for instance Julio Cortázar's novel *Rayuela* (1963), and Pierre Boulez's Third Piano Sonata (1955-57; rev. 1963) and *Domaines* (1961-68) for solo clarinet or clarinet with twenty-one instruments.

<sup>9</sup> The term performance is used in relation to a wide range of artistic and non-artistic activities. Vicky Unruh notes that academics give too many different meanings to this concept: 'While many scholars (I include myself) find such mixing it up fruitful, a well-founded complaint that accompanies such keywords in their transdisciplinary chain reactions is that they can mean just about anything.' Vicky Unruh, *Performing Women and Modern Literary Culture in Latin America: Intervening Acts* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2006), p. 3. Richard Schechner has similar views on the countless meanings of this concept in scholarship: 'There are limits to what "is" performance. But just about anything can be studied "as" performance.' Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 30.

<sup>10</sup> Chris Baldick, 'Irony', in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 130. When analysing issues of irony, I have often consulted Lars Elleström's book *Divine Madness* (2002), which transfers the concept of irony from the literary to the visual and aural

places irony at different levels, in the music itself, in the performers and audiences, in musical practices, in the historical background of compositions and other forms of contexts. Situations of irony may or may not be shared by the characters and the reader, and these are frequently directed at a musically-informed reader.

### Intellectual context and previous scholarship

Roberto González Echevarría, in his book *Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim at Home* (1977), first noted Carpentier's assimilation of Oswald Spengler's best-seller *The Decline of the West* (1918-22), a study in the philosophy of history which presents mankind in terms of biologically conceived cultures that develop on a predetermined course of growth and decay. Spengler centres his discussion on three cultures which he associates with souls:

[...] the soul of the Classical Culture, which chose the sensuously-present individual body as the ideal type of the extended, by the name (familiarized by Nietzsche) of the *Apollinian* [sic]. In opposition to it we have the *Faustian* soul, whose prime-symbol is pure and limitless space, and whose "body" is the Western culture [...]. And in the time of Augustus, in the countries between Nile and Tigris, Black Sea and South Arabia, there appears – aloof but able to speak to us through forms borrowed, adopted and inherited – the Magian soul of the Arabian Culture.<sup>11</sup>

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domains. Elleström discusses the history of the concept of irony, the question of its intentionality, the various classifications of irony, and the use of irony in works of arts and criticism. He compares the use of irony in literature and in music, asserting that this concept generally 'seems to have the capacity to bridge most alleged differences between the two art forms.' Lars Elleström, *Divine Madness: On Interpreting Literature, Music, and the Visual Arts Ironically* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 2002), p. 218.

<sup>11</sup> Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, trans. by Charles F. Atkinson, One Volume edn (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971 [1918-22]), I, 183. Presumably, Spengler took the concept of the Faustian from Goethe's drama *Faust* (1808-32). His opposition of the Faustian with the Apollinian [sic] souls may find parallel in Nietzsche's idea of the Dionysian impulse (associated with change, creation and destruction) in contrast to the Apollonian force (linked to order, lawfulness and perfected form).

For González Echevarría, Spengler's influence 'is felt in most of the terms and concepts used by Carpentier: the cycles of culture, the physiognomy of culture, the law of necessity, and above all, vitalism.'<sup>12</sup> He adds,

Spengler provided the philosophical ground on which to stake the autonomy of Latin American culture and deny its filial relation to Europe. Spengler's cyclic conception of the history of cultures kindled the hope that if Europe was in decline, Latin America must be then in an earlier, more promising stage of her own independent evolution (p. 56).

However, Spengler pays very little attention to Latin America, swiftly mentioning 'the Mexican culture' (meaning the civilisations before the arrival of the Spaniards) as an exception to the idea of infancy-youth-maturity-death cycles of cultures.<sup>13</sup>

In two letters to Carpentier, González Echevarría points out the relation between his novels and *The Decline*. In his replies, Carpentier does not comment on the critic's remarks.<sup>14</sup> To my knowledge, the only writings in which the Cuban author explicitly mentions the German philosopher are his article 'Manuel de Falla en París' (1930) and 'Los orígenes de la música y la música primitiva'. In 'Manuel de Falla en París', Carpentier uses Spengler's opposition of the Faustian and the Apollinian souls to illustrate the oscillating tendencies in contemporary arts. He praises Varèse, Honegger and Milhaud for having a 'deseo de claridad, de precisión' [desire for clarity, for precision] and striving for 'un estilo vertebrado' [a structured style].<sup>15</sup> In 'Los orígenes de la música', he associates the rhythmic music of 'primitive' man with the Faustian soul, opposing it to the Apollonian polyphony of the Renaissance. This suggests that Carpentier may not have studied Spengler's specific ideas on music, which are

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<sup>12</sup> Roberto González Echevarría, *Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim at Home* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 41. *The Decline of the West* was translated into Spanish by Manuel García Morente in 1923 and was published by the magazine *Revista de Occidente*.

<sup>13</sup> Spengler summarises his ideas on worldwide spiritual, cultural and political developments in three schemes at the end of Part I (the pages of these schemes are not numbered). Here, there is not a single mention of the pre- and post-Columbian cultures of the present Latin America.

<sup>14</sup> 'Carta No 2', dated 5 October 1972, and 'Carta No. 6', dated 12 August 1974. González Echevarría, ed., *Cartas de Carpentier*, pp. 157-59 (p. 158), 166-69 (p. 167).

<sup>15</sup> Alejo Carpentier, 'Manuel de Falla en París', in *Crónicas 2*, Obras Completas Series, 16 vols (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1983-94), IX (1986), 251-54 (p. 254).

significantly different to his own. For Spengler, the Faustian soul represents the body of the Western-European civilisation and is responsible for the most significant developments in music, the polyphonic works of Bach, Haydn and Mozart being the peak of Western music. Scholars who have examined Carpentier's work in the light of Spengler's *Decline* have not paid attention to the substantial discussions of music in this text, which are mostly in chapters VII and VIII of Part I.<sup>16</sup>

Carpentier's ideas have been linked to the work of another German philosopher, Theodor W. Adorno, by Timothy Brennan.<sup>17</sup> In his book *At Home in the World:*

*Cosmopolitanism Now* (1997), Brennan affirms that Carpentier

[...] was arguably as important a theorist of music as Theodor Adorno. Consequently, there is an inherent interest in the way in which he promoted forms of popular and symphonic music while analyzing the Adornian problems of radio and recording technologies but arriving at vastly different conclusions.<sup>18</sup>

As far as I have been able to establish, Carpentier does not explicitly cite Adorno in any of his critical writings. Yet this does not rule out the possibility that the Cuban writer read Adorno's work, most likely in French or English translations. Among Adorno's most important works on music which were translated during Carpentier's lifetime are *Philosophy of New Music* (1949) and *Introduction to the Sociology of Music* (1962).

Central to *Philosophy of New Music* is the Stravinsky-Schoenberg polarisation, in which Adorno expresses positive views on atonalism and Expressionism, and disdain for Stravinsky, accusing him of creating music as myth. In contrast, Carpentier highly

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<sup>16</sup> Very few studies on Spengler's ideas on music have been published. The most comprehensive one appears to be still Arthur Mendel, 'Spengler's Quarrel with the Methods of Music History', *The Musical Quarterly*, 20 (1934), 131-71, followed by T. C. Day, 'Downfall of Western Music - as Described by Nordau, Spengler and Toynbee', *Music Review*, 37 (1976), 52-65, and Wolfgang Krebs, 'Kultur, Musik und der Untergang des Abendlandes: Bemerkungen zu Oswald Spenglers Geschichtsphilosophie', *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft*, 55 (1998), 311-31.

<sup>17</sup> Adorno criticised Spengler's ideas in the light of the catastrophic events of the Second World War in 'Spengler After the Decline', in *Prisms*, trans. by Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1981), pp. 51-72. For an examination of Adorno's ideas on Spengler, see Kevin McNeilly, 'Cultural Morphologies: Yeats, Spengler and Adorno', *Irish University Review*, 27 (1997), 245-61.

<sup>18</sup> Brennan, *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 260.



regards Stravinsky, particularly his *Rite of Spring*, a work which features significantly in his novel *La consagración de la primavera*.<sup>19</sup>

Anke Birkenmaier, in her book *Alejo Carpentier y la cultura del surrealismo en América Latina* (2006), further compares Carpentier's and Adorno's ideas on popular music, the reception of mass-media culture, instruments of mechanic and electronic reproduction, and concert and environmental music. She illustrates how the problem of music reception through mass-media is central to Carpentier's librettos for Edgard Varèse's opera *The One All Alone* (1931) and Marius-François Gaillard's cantata *La Passion noire* (1932).<sup>20</sup> Birkenmaier explores Carpentier's aesthetic innovations related to mass-media. She proposes the concept of 'oralidad mediatizada' [media-driven orality] as a key influence of Surrealism in Latin American literature after the Second World War. According to her, this notion is found in the narrative as a psychological feature that represents the collective or individual voice of the subconscious. Birkenmaier argues that Carpentier's most important aesthetic innovation was the incorporation of some of the techniques learnt in the course of his radio activities (for instance, a writing style that allows readers to identify themselves with the narrative) and also through his collaboration with composers.

Caroline Rae's article 'In Havana and Paris: the Musical Activities of Alejo Carpentier' (2008) deals with Carpentier's advocacy of contemporary music during the inter-war years. Rae scrutinises Carpentier's role as a concert promoter (particularly as the organiser of Música Nueva, the first Cuban society for contemporary music) and as a music critic, noting that these activities 'aimed to stimulate debate among his

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<sup>19</sup> Adorno's critique of *The Rite* is found in *Philosophy of New Music*, trans. by Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006 [1949]), pp. 111-21. For an analysis of Adorno's Schoenberg-Stravinsky polarisation, see Max Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 266-70. Carpentier, in his discussion of the music of Roldán and García Caturla in *La música en Cuba*, equates the complexity and richness of the rhythms of Stravinsky's *Rite* with those from Afro-Cuban music. Alejo Carpentier, *La música en Cuba* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1946), pp. 235-36 [*Music in Cuba*, trans. by Alan West-Durán (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), pp. 268-69].

<sup>20</sup> Anke Birkenmaier, *Alejo Carpentier y la cultura del surrealismo en América Latina* (Madrid: Iberoamericana; Frankfurt a.M.: Verveurt, 2006), pp. 181-202.

*vanguardia* contemporaries and raise awareness of repertory then largely unknown in Cuba.<sup>21</sup> Rae examines Carpentier's use of *The Rite of Spring* as a model for defining a Cuban cultural identity, indicating that he was 'intellectually attracted to the ballet as a means of creating a total sound-visual theatrical experience for his personal manifesto of Cubanidad (p. 382).' For her, the ideas generated by Stravinsky's composition crucially influenced Carpentier's creative collaborations with composers Alejandro García Caturla, Amadeo Roldán and Marius-François Gaillard.

Carpentier's critical writings on music and activities in Paris and Havana are explored by Brennan from a different point of view. In *At Home in the World*, he focuses on Carpentier's interest in Cuban popular music for export and on his antagonistic relationship with the European avant-gardes.<sup>22</sup> Brennan further discusses these issues in his lengthy introduction to the 2001 English translation of *La música en Cuba* (1946, *Music in Cuba*), where he highlights Carpentier's merit in discovering New York musicians borrowing Caribbean rhythms and the commercial potential of Cuban popular genres such as *son* (later renamed *salsa*).<sup>23</sup> For Brennan, Carpentier's pioneering study 'managed to popularize (or better, colloquialize) a story that had until then been imprisoned in ethnography of a technical sort (p. 3).'

Soon after the publication of *La música en Cuba*, Carpentier embarked on a trip to the Orinoco River area in Venezuela, which he documented in 'El libro de la Gran Sabana'.<sup>24</sup> This account is mentioned by González Echevarría in his critical edition of *Los pasos perdidos* (1985) as the foundation of the novel. González Echevarría also identifies numerous autobiographical and historical details, as well as geographical and

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<sup>21</sup> Caroline Rae, 'In Havana and Paris: the Musical Activities of Alejo Carpentier', *Music and Letters*, 89 (2008), 373-95 (p. 375).

<sup>22</sup> Brennan, *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now*, pp. 259-306.

<sup>23</sup> Timothy Brennan, 'Introduction to the English Edition', in *Music in Cuba*, trans. by Alan West-Durán (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), pp. 1-58 (p. 1).

<sup>24</sup> Alejo Carpentier, 'El libro de la Gran Sabana: Hojas dispersas' [n.d.], Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, Colección Carpentier, CM 186.

anthropological studies of the Orinoco such as Gheebrant's *Des hommes qu'on appelle sauvages* and *L'Expedition Orénoque-Amazone*, which he considers one of the most direct sources for the novel.<sup>25</sup> González Echevarría suggests several intertexts that portray the South American jungle, including the *Popol Vuh*, Gumilla's *El Orinoco ilustrado*, Darwin's various writings, Humboldt's *Personal Narrative of Travels to the Equinoctial Regions of the New Continent*, Schomburgk's *Reisen in Britisch-Guiana in den Jahren 1840-1844*, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Conan Doyle's *Lost World*, Rivera's *La vorágine*, Gallegos's *Canaima*, among others, arguing that *Los pasos perdidos*

[...] no sólo narra el viaje a la selva del protagonista-narrador, sino su viaje por esta selva textual en busca de un relato que los contenga a todos, que necesariamente ha de ser el relato en que se narra ese mismo proceso (p. 47).

[...] not only narrates the protagonist-narrator's trip to the jungle, but also his trip through this textual jungle in search of a story that contains them all, which necessarily has to be the story where that process is narrated.

González Echevarría explores the relation between some of the former sources and the novel, yet he does not explain how Darwin's writings may have been assimilated (in his *Pilgrim at Home*, he does not explore Darwin's texts in detail either).

Fernanda Peñaloza, in her article 'Appropriating the 'Unattainable': The British Travel Experience in Patagonia' (2008), identifies the most recurrent images that traverse the narratives of Charles Darwin and other British travellers: 'First, Patagonia itself as a metaphor of the unattainable, and, second, its inhabitants as a vanishing vision in the prelude to civilisation', adding that 'these accounts have contributed to a certain extent to the creation of a territory devoid of historicity.'<sup>26</sup> Carpentier's *Los pasos perdidos*, with its visions of the natural world and its 'pre-civilised' indigenous people,

<sup>25</sup> Roberto González Echevarría, 'Introducción', in *Los pasos perdidos* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1985), pp. 15-53 (pp. 40-41). A thorough examination of *Los pasos perdidos*'s sources can be found in González Echevarría, *The Pilgrim at Home*, pp. 174-83.

<sup>26</sup> Fernanda Peñaloza, 'Appropriating the 'Unattainable': The British Travel Experience in Patagonia', *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 27 (2008), 149-72.

deals with the unattainable too. For the unnamed narrator-protagonist, the jungle becomes the most authentic source of creativity, a place where he can fulfil his true vocation. Music performed by primeval beings, in its idyllic union with words, is for him the driving impulse to realise his long-dreamed yet ultimately unachievable artistic project. Unlike the texts examined by Peñaloza, Carpentier's views are by no means lacking historicity.<sup>27</sup>

Pablo Montoya Campuzano, in his article '*Los pasos perdidos y las teorías sobre el origen de la música*' (2005), discusses the relation between the novel and various theories, drawn from Ancient Greece to the first half of the twentieth century, paying particular attention to the works by Aristotle, Rousseau, Diderot, Fétis and Schaeffner.<sup>28</sup> Montoya Campuzano concludes that the novel is placed at the heart of the twentieth-century ethnomusicological debate led by Schaeffner. Montoya Campuzano's study, despite its vast scope, does not consider Darwin's ideas on music. These have had a paramount influence in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century anthropological and musicological circles in Europe and Latin America.<sup>29</sup> Darwin's concepts continue to have relevance in the present context of evolutionary musicology, which deals with the evolutionary origins of music, both in terms of a comparative approach to vocal communication in animals and an evolutionary psychological approach to the emergence of music in the hominid line.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> For an examination of the role of history in Carpentier's fiction, see Óscar Velayos Zurdo, *Historia y utopía en Alejo Carpentier* (Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, 1990).

<sup>28</sup> Pablo Montoya Campuzano, '*Los pasos perdidos y las teorías sobre el origen de la música*', *Revista Universidad Eafit*, 41 (2005), 57-66.

<sup>29</sup> Positivist circles were particularly important in the dissemination of evolutionary ideas in nineteenth-century Latin America. See Thomas F. Glick, Rosaura Ruiz, and Miguel Ángel Puig-Samper, eds., *The Reception of Darwinism in the Iberian World: Spain, Spanish America and Brazil* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2001 [1999]), and Thomas Glick, *Darwin y el Darwinismo en el Uruguay y en América Latina* (Montevideo: Universidad de la República, 1989). For a historical overview of positivism in Latin America see Leopoldo Zea, ed., *Pensamiento positivista latinoamericano*, 2 vols (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1980).

<sup>30</sup> Steven Brown, Björn Merker, and Nils L. Wallin, 'An Introduction to Evolutionary Musicology', in *The Origins of Music*, ed. by Nils L. Wallin, Björn Merker, and Steven Brown (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2000), pp. 3-24 (p. 5). Ian Cross and Iain Morley identify the four main views in current evolutionary musicological thinking: (i) music promotes group cohesion, (ii) music is a product of group

Vicky Unruh's book *Latin American Vanguardists: The Art of Contentious Encounters* (1994) deals with various literary vanguard movements which emerged in Latin America during the 1920s and 30s. Unruh notes that these movements sought to challenge and redefine art through aesthetic innovations and experiments, engaging, at the same time, with the notion of the primeval:

Sustaining the avant-gardes' relentless quest for the original, or the very new, was the paradoxical fascination with the originary, the very old, that is, with a time-before-time of experience harboring the mysteries of the creative process. [...] In Latin America, originary discourse was widespread even in vanguardist writing that eschewed an autochthonous agenda. [...] Because of its ongoing engagement with what were perceived as originary cultures, indigenous or, as with West African presences, more recently imported, Latin America was depicted through the primitivist motifs of its vanguardist texts, as the originary site of the original, the place of first times, and of a new language, a new art, and newness itself.<sup>31</sup>

Carpentier's ethnological explorations are discussed in more detail in Amy Fass Emery's book *The Anthropological Imagination in Latin American Literature* (1996), which assesses the effect of the various rhetorical styles and strategies of anthropology upon texts by several twentieth-century writers. Emery explains that after the First World War, there was a sense that the colonized Other was in possession of something the West had lost: innocence, authenticity, natural rhythms, ties to the earth, and the stability of collective traditions in the face of, and as an alternative to, a chaotic and sterile modernity. Her analysis of Carpentier's ethnological explorations is focused on the novel *¡Ecué-Yamba-Ó!* (1933) and his collaborations with the French magazines *Documents* and *Bifur*.<sup>32</sup> Along these lines, Birkenmaier traces Carpentier's contacts with ethnographic and surrealist circles in France and Latin America, and the ways in

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selection, (iii) socio-emotional bonding is favoured by evolution of musical signalling, and (iv) music promoted sexual selection. Ian Cross and Iain Morley, 'The Evolution of Music: Theories, Definitions and the Nature of the Evidence', in *Communicative Musicality*, ed. by Stephen Malloch and Colwyn Trevarthen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 61-81.

<sup>31</sup> Vicky Unruh, *Latin American Vanguardists: The Art of Contentious Encounters* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 141-42.

<sup>32</sup> Amy Fass Emery, *The Anthropological Imagination in Latin American Literature* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1996), particularly her chapter on Carpentier, 'The "Anthropological Flâneur" in Paris: *Documents*, *Bifur*, and Collage Culture in Carpentier's *¡Ecué-Yamba-Ó!*', pp. 24-42. See also Carlos Rincón, 'Carpentier "Francés": *Documents*, *Bifur*, *Un Cadavre* y dos cartas a Georges Bataille', *Nuevo Texto Crítico*, 22 (2009), 101-21.

which these connections shaped his artistic works, particularly those written between 1928 and 1933: the short stories 'El milagro del ascensor', 'El estudiante' and 'Histoire de lunes', the *Poèmes des Antilles* (written in collaboration with composer Gaillard) and the novel *¡Écue-Yamba-Ó!*.<sup>33</sup> Birkenmaier views Carpentier during that period 'no tanto como novelista sino más bien como coleccionista de objetos de santería, etnógrafo y musicólogo (p. 55)' [not so much as a novelist but as a collector of *santería* objects, as an ethnographer and musicologist]. Birkenmaier also addresses Carpentier's later contacts with the Bureau d'Ethnologie Haïtienne, the presence of voodoo chants in *El reino de este mundo* and the role of these in the conceptualisation of 'lo real maravilloso' (pp. 100-16).

Further to Emery's and Birkenmaier's studies, Amy Nauss Millay's book *Voices from the fuente viva: The Effect of Orality in Twentieth-Century Spanish American Narrative* (2005) deals with the representation of orality and literacy in Latin American anthropological and fictional texts, and the ways by which the Other's speech is inscribed within Western literate culture. Millay recognises that the process of mediating between writing and speech is manifest in both literary and anthropological discourses, stating that 'The contradictory insider/outsider position of the anthropologist-writer lies at the heart of the complex problem of writing the oral.'<sup>34</sup> For Millay, the search of the protagonist of *Los pasos perdidos* 'is for a passage from the oral to the written (p. 23).' While I agree that the novel constantly mediates between these two modes, I believe that the protagonist's most imperative search is to turn the primal relation between words and music into art.

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<sup>33</sup> Birkenmaier, *Alejo Carpentier y la cultura del surrealismo en América Latina*, pp. 25-85. Birkenmaier draws on James Clifford's study of comparative ethnography, 'On Ethnographic Surrealism', in *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 117-52.

<sup>34</sup> Amy Nauss Millay, *Voices from the fuente viva: The Effect of Orality in Twentieth-Century Spanish American Narrative* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2005), p. 13.

The quest for re-uniting words and music in *Los pasos perdidos* may be related to Wagner's ideas on how music can regain its original fullness through drama, which he put forward in his book *Opera and Drama* (1850-51). To my knowledge, the possible influence of Wagner's writings on Carpentier has not been explored by critics yet. However, Carpentier's 1948 essay 'Tristán e Isolda en tierra firme' (written in response to the first performance of the opera *Tristan and Isolde* in Caracas) is discussed by Dominic Moran in his article 'Carpentier's Wagner: Tristan and Isolde Brought down to Earth? (2005)'.<sup>35</sup> Moran proposes that 'Tristán e Isolda' constitutes something like the missing piece by which its author attempted to explain how the European-born artistic tendencies were recast in Latin America, highlighting the inconsistencies between the high value placed on romantic ideas in it and the invariably negative connotations of Romanticism in his fiction, particularly in the allusions to Wagner.

In his article 'Carpentier's Stravinsky: Rites and Wrongs' (2002), Moran aims to demonstrate that music is an inextricable aspect of the encounter and overlapping of historical, cultural, racial and political conflicts in Carpentier's work. Moran explores Stravinsky's and Carpentier's ideas concerning cultural belonging and creative identity, particularly the references to the 'primitive' peoples and cultural riches of their respective nations. In his discussion of *La consagración de la primavera*, Moran relates the concept of the revolutionary to the form of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, stating that

The very form, or rather, the lack of form of Stravinsky's work would seem to render it [the dialectic of revolution in the novel] singularly inappropriate as a blueprint for the elegantly spiralling revolutionary process envisioned by Carpentier, despite the fact that the latter insisted on seeing 'todo un proceso de *praxis* revolucionaria' in the successive sections of the ballet and Roerich's accompanying set designs ('El ángel de las maracas', 203). [...] The irony lies here in the fact that Stravinsky composed the work this way so that it would stand apart as starkly as possible from the easy continuities and resolutions of the 'developmental', dialectically conceived music of the falsely sophisticated panromanogermanic (Hegelian) tradition – that same tradition which

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<sup>35</sup> Dominic Moran, 'Carpentier's Wagner: Tristan and Isolde Brought down to Earth?' *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*, 82 (2005), 215-40.

Carpentier himself ardently decries even as he pilfers its concepts and ideology in order to orchestrate his own works.<sup>36</sup>

Moran's argument appears problematic, for works of music or literature need not have an innovative form to be considered revolutionary. It is unclear whether Moran understands the term form as a particular generic music category, or simply as the organisation of material in a musical composition. Distinct categories such as sonata form or theme and variations may lend themselves to literary analogies, as seen in attempts by Carpentier and other writers to imitate musical form.<sup>37</sup> Since *The Rite* is constructed as a sequence of self-contained vignettes rather than in a particular classical music form, it is difficult to see how analogies to *La consagración* on a macro-structural level can be made. However, the novel's arrangement in chapters with distinct narrative voices (all forty-two chapters except the fourth and the last one are voiced by either Vera or Enrique) may reflect the structure of Stravinsky's piece, in which most vignettes are assigned to a particular individual or group participating in the rite of fecundation. *The Rite* is largely seen as a revolutionary piece for its bursting rhythmic irregularities and groundbreaking harmony (particularly by its use of bitonality and modal fields), yet it follows a fairly conventional ballet form. It is the marrying of *The Rite* with revolutionary political impulses – rather than Stravinsky's opposition to 'the falsely sophisticated panromanogermanic (Hegelian) tradition' that Moran proposes – that is the most important conveyor of irony in Carpentier's ideologically-charged understanding of *The Rite*, for this piece grew out of, and was re-absorbed back into the

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<sup>36</sup> Dominic Moran, 'Carpentier's Stravinsky: Rites and Wrongs', *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*, 79 (2002), 81-104 (pp. 92-93). Carpentier's statement quoted by Moran, 'todo un proceso de *praxis* revolucionaria', does not belong to the article 'El ángel de las maracas' but to the interview with Salvador del Río, 'Conversación con Alejo Carpentier', in *Ese músico que llevo dentro 3. La música en Cuba*, Obras Completas, 16 vols (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1983-94), XII (1987), 193-203 (pp. 202-03). It should be noted that in this interview, when asked about the relation between his novel and Stravinsky's work, Carpentier plainly replies: 'En esto hay una relación meramente literaria (p. 202)' [Here, there is a merely literary relation].

<sup>37</sup> Many examples of literary analogies to musical form can be found in Calvin S. Brown, *Music and Literature: A Comparison of the Arts* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1987 [1948]) and Calvin S. Brown, 'Theme and Variations as a Literary Form', *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature*, 27 (1978), 35-43.



Western capitalist culture, and Stravinsky's artistic and political attitudes were unacceptable to the Bolsheviks and the subsequent Soviet regime.<sup>38</sup>

Unruh's article 'The Performing Spectator in Alejo Carpentier's Fictional World' (1998) examines the role of performances in Carpentier's fictional and non-fictional works, focusing on issues of subjectivity and cultural identity. Unruh suggests that

[...] in Carpentier's fiction, cultures are often characterized by the performances they create, identities are defined through shifting relationships between spectators and the events they witness, cross-cultural encounters are portrayed through competing enactments or divergently positioned audiences, and narrators and characters are often ambiguously situated on the mercurial boundary between the action and the audience of a performance.<sup>39</sup>

As stated above, my analysis of performances in Carpentier's work is focused on *El acoso* and *La consagración de la primavera*, none of which is examined by Unruh in detail.

Maarten van Delden, in his article 'The Museum and the Opera-House: Modernity and Identity in Alejo Carpentier's *Los pasos perdidos*' (2007), explores four aspects of modernity portrayed in *Los pasos perdidos*: the modernity of the capitalist/bourgeois, of the bohemian, of cultural institutions and of underdevelopment. For van Delden, the Museum of Organology plays an important role 'in both relying on and reinforcing the metropolitan domination of non-Western cultures'.<sup>40</sup> I shall show that these dominant views on non-Western cultures are found in the debates on the origin of music too. Van Delden affirms: 'The legitimacy of the enterprise [of collecting

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<sup>38</sup> Stravinsky had sympathy for fascism, as seen in the letter he wrote to the Italian music critic Alberto Gasco: 'I don't believe that anyone venerates Mussolini more than I. To me, he is the *one man who counts* nowadays in the whole world. [...] I have an overpowering urge to render homage to your Duce. He is the saviour of Italy and – let us hope – of Europe.' Cited in Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music*, p. 306. In his *Poetics of Music*, Stravinsky stated: 'I was made a revolutionary in spite of myself.' Igor Stravinsky, *Poetics of Music, in the Form of Six Lessons*, trans. by Arthur Knodel and Ingolf Dahl (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1947 [1942]), p. 10.

<sup>39</sup> Vicky Unruh, 'The Performing Spectator in Alejo Carpentier's Fictional World', *Hispanic Review*, 66 (1998), 57-77 (p. 59).

<sup>40</sup> Maarten van Delden, 'The Museum and the Opera-House: Modernity and Identity in Alejo Carpentier's *Los pasos perdidos*', in *Caribbean Interfaces*, ed. by Lieven D'hulst and others, Studies in Comparative Literature Series, 52 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), pp. 47-65 (p. 64).

‘primitive’ instruments] is not an issue for the narrator, nor for anyone else in the novel (p. 54).’ While the narrator does not reflect on the ethics of taking possession of the instruments, he does question whether he has the necessary skills and up-to-date knowledge to engage with such an important mission. For van Delden, *Los pasos perdidos* should be read not only as a journey in space, ‘but also as a passage through a series of transitional spaces, of which the museum and the opera-house constitute two of the most striking examples (p. 63).’ The passage from the oral to the written, and the passage from language to music, may also be considered as transitional spaces.

In his article ‘Making Sense in Carpentier’s *El acoso*’ (1990), Steven Boldy examines the use of established texts and the models of music and architecture in *El acoso*, asserting that these allow opportunity for ambiguity and irony.<sup>41</sup> He notes that much of the commentary on music concerns its changing of function, and how it is (mis)understood and interpreted by the characters. For Boldy, ‘the presence of the *Eroica*, and especially the heroic language associated with it, is fundamentally ironic in a novel in which elsewhere characters have the greatest trouble in making acts and patterns, model and reality, coincide in any simple manner (p. 619)’. In Chapter Five, I shall uncover more layers of irony encircling music in *El acoso*.

Andreas Kurz, in his article ‘Alejo Carpentier y Thomas Mann: Dos guerras del tiempo’ (2005), suggests that Carpentier was inspired by Mann’s erudition, his interest in music and his approach to the epic novel, particularly in *La consagración de la primavera*.<sup>42</sup> Kurz notes that both writers use specialist knowledge in relation to artistic, technical and scientific matters; their novels have active narrators and are concerned with the role of the artist in contemporary society and historical reality. According to Kurz, Carpentier does not take Mann ‘como un modelo para sus propios intentos de

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<sup>41</sup> Steven Boldy, ‘Making Sense in Carpentier’s *El acoso*’, *The Modern Language Review*, 85 (1990), 612-22 (pp. 612-13).

<sup>42</sup> Andreas Kurz, ‘Alejo Carpentier y Thomas Mann: Dos guerras del tiempo’, *Casa de las Américas*, 238 (2005), 129-36.

transferir procedimientos musicales a la literatura (p. 131)' [as a model for his own efforts to transfer musical procedures to literature]. Kurz does not consider that Carpentier's use of leitmotif as a literary device (for instance the banknote in *El acoso* and 'L'Internationale' in *La consagración de la primavera*) may have been modelled on Mann's adaptation of Wagner's leitmotif technique.<sup>43</sup> Intrinsic to the definition of leitmotif is the concept of repetition. In both 'Los orígenes de la música' and *Los pasos perdidos*, repetition is discussed in relation to the origin of so-called primitive music and the development of Western-music forms.

Several critics have attempted to interpret Carpentier's formal analogies with music in a literal way. Among the most widely cited studies that follow this approach are Emil Volek's article 'Análisis del sistema de estructuras musicales e interpretación de *El acoso* de Alejo Carpentier' (1969), which attempts to make a literal analogy with music in *El acoso* by merging and mixing very different musical forms, and Helmy Giacomán's 'La relación músico-literaria entre la Tercera Sinfonía *Eroica* de Beethoven y la novela *El acoso* de Alejo Carpentier' (1968), which proposes a thematic relation between *El acoso* and the *Eroica* Symphony, concluding that the two works correspond in detail.<sup>44</sup> These two studies are very widely cited by critics, generally as evidence of the integration of music in Carpentier's fiction. I shall analyse these two articles in detail in Chapter Three.

In his book *The Repeating Island* (1992), Antonio Benítez Rojo postulates that the Caribbean novel shows 'a will to set itself up at all cost as a total performance'.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> For Mann's use of leitmotif, see Michael Minden, 'Mann's literary techniques', in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Mann*, ed. by Ritchie Robertson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 43-63, and Judith Ryan, 'Buddenbrooks: Between Realism and Aestheticism', in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Mann* (see above), pp. 119-36.

<sup>44</sup> Emil Volek, 'Análisis del sistema de estructuras musicales e interpretación de *El acoso* de Alejo Carpentier', *Philologica Pragensia*, 12 (1969), 1-24; Helmy F. Giacomán, 'La relación músico-literaria entre la Tercera Sinfonía *Eroica* de Beethoven y la novela *El acoso* de Alejo Carpentier' (1968), in *Homenaje a Alejo Carpentier*, ed. by Helmy F. Giacomán (New York: Las Americas, 1970), pp. 441-65.

<sup>45</sup> Antonio Benítez Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, trans. by James Maraniss (Durham, NC; London: Duke University Press, 1992), p. 218.

(He understands performance as ‘public entertainment of any kind [p. 218]’.) Next, Benítez Rojo seeks to examine Carpentier’s short story ‘Viaje a la semilla’ ‘in a spectacular and unforeseen way (p. 221)’, paralleling it to a crab canon (or *canon cancrizans*), a device in counterpoint whereby one voice presents a prime melody and another voice imitates it in retrograde.<sup>46</sup> ‘Viaje a la semilla’ begins with the demolition of the mansion of a deceased nobleman. The narration flows into his past, going back to his wake, old age, mid-life, adolescence, childhood, babyhood and conception, ending with the dissolution of all matter. In Carpentier’s text, Benítez Rojo sees ‘a discourse that moves in a normal progression, which I will call P, and another discourse that moves backwards, which from now on I will call R (p. 222).’ He identifies both discourses in the following passage (R is in italics):

*And a splendid evening party was given in the music room on the day he achieved minority. He was delighted to know that his signature was no longer valid, and that worm-eaten registers and documents would now vanish from his world. He had reached the point at which courts of justice were no longer to be feared, because his bodily existence was ignored by the law. After getting tipsy on noble wines, the young people took down from the walls a guitar inlaid with mother-of-pearl, a psalter, and a serpent. Someone wound up the clock that played the “Ranz-des-vaches” and the “Ballad of the Scottish Lakes.” Someone else blew on a hunting horn that had been lying curled in copper sleep on the crimson felt lining of the showcase, beside a transverse flute brought from Aranjuez. Marcial, who was boldly making love to Señora de Campoflorido, joined in the cacophony, and tried to pick out the tune of “Típili-Trápala” on the piano, to a discordant accompaniment in the bass. Then they all trooped upstairs to the attic, remembering that the liveries and clothes of the Capellánías family had been stored away under its beams *which were recovering their plaster* (p. 222).<sup>47</sup>*

Benítez Rojo’s conclusion that the two discourses he identifies in ‘Viaje a la semilla’ and the voices of a musical canon ‘are analogous dynamics, functions of analogous structures (p. 223)’ is unsatisfactory primarily because the story and plot of Carpentier’s text are not in a relationship of prime and retrograde.<sup>48</sup> In order to emulate canonic

<sup>46</sup> Benítez Rojo previously made another analogy with a musical canon by Bach in “‘El camino de Santiago”, de Alejo Carpentier, y el *Canon perpetuus*, de Juan Sebastian Bach: Paralelismo estructural”, *Revista Iberoamericana*, 49 (1983), 293-322.

<sup>47</sup> Benítez Rojo quotes from *War of Time*, trans. Frances Partridge (New York: Knopf, 1970), pp. 115-16.

<sup>48</sup> Here I am drawing on the Russian Formalists’ distinction between *fabula* (the story, or what actually happened) and *sjuzet* (the plot, or how the reader becomes aware of what happened). The ramifications of

imitation, a 'literary' crab canon would need to contain two distinct discourses that narrate the *same* events in opposite order. In other words, it is not possible to imitate something backwards unless it is seen going forwards somewhere else. Benítez Rojo does not demonstrate how Carpentier's text engages with the concept of performance as 'public entertainment', as stated above. Rather bizarrely, the critic uses the idea of spectacle in relation to his own work, as he declares that 'given the spectacular nature of just such a find [the analogy with crab canon], I prefer to delay my presentation until the close of my own performance, an amateur's interpretation that needs the help of a showy final number (p. 225).'

Leiling Chang, in her book *Métissages et résonnances* (2002), examines a number of literary texts by different authors in the context of the musical culture of Cuba. She postulates that in these texts, music and literature are intertwined not only in sonic and novelistic content but also through the aesthetic and philosophical choices resulting from or inspired by musical practices.<sup>49</sup> In the first part of the book, Chang reviews various historical aspects of music in Cuba, including practices, ethnic components, genres, music criticism and musicological research. The second part deals with literary texts, which are examined in terms of the musical treatment of the prose, structure, the question of time and analogies to music. In her chapter on Carpentier's 1974 novella *Concierto barroco* (pp. 141-96), Chang examines various formal aspects including macro and microstructures, syntax and phonology. She does not attempt to make literal analogies with music, but parallels generic aspects of narrative with musical elements, for instance the divisions produced by chapters with musical rests. Interestingly, Chang interprets the semiotic function of these formal analogies. For example, she argues that *Concierto barroco* is polyphonic because it allows a plurality

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this dichotomy are further developed in Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978).

<sup>49</sup> Leiling Chang Melis, *Métissages et résonnances: Essais sur la musique et la littérature cubaines* (Paris: L' Harmattan, 2002).

of meanings in its superposing of structures.<sup>50</sup> Chang's study is highly informative, although it risks fragmenting into discrete studies of very diverse issues.

Gabriel Rubio Navarro's book *Música y escritura en Alejo Carpentier* (1999) examines the role of music in a number of Carpentier's fictional writings. This study is basically an extensive review of previous scholarship (the most recent studies included date from the late 1980s) and does not contain significant original arguments. The author himself defines his work as a 'trabajo de síntesis' [work of synthesis].<sup>51</sup>

### Interdisciplinary research

Interdisciplinary research in literature and music is a still-emerging field, although it is now some decades since pioneering studies such as *Music and Literature: A Comparison of the Arts* by Calvin S. Brown (1948) and *Verbal Music in German Literature* by Steven P. Scher (1968) paved the way for the integration of literary and musicological approaches. Ever since, a growing number of scholars have begun to employ combined methodologies.

A useful recent collection of essays by both musicologists and literary scholars is *Phrase and Subject: Studies in Literature and Music* (2006). In her Introduction to this volume, Delia da Sousa Correa surveys interdisciplinary approaches used by scholars working in literature and music since the mid-1980s. She identifies a growing interest in the aesthetic and cultural interactions between music and literature,

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<sup>50</sup> An interesting discussion about the use of the term 'polyphony' can be found in Peter Dayan, 'L'absence de la polyphonie dans les romans de George Sand' (unpublished conference paper delivered at the George Sand Society, Dublin City University, 2006). Dayan notes that literary scholars commonly talk about polyphony when referring to the multiplicity of voices in a novel (musicologists understand this term as the plurality of *equal* voices). He indicates that the term became popular in literary studies after Mikhail Bakhtin began to use it. However, Bakhtin used two different Russian words that have been indifferently translated as 'polyphony': one word that could be transcribed as 'polifonija' and corresponds to 'polyphony' in the musicological sense, and a different one could be transcribed as 'raznogolosie' and may be translated as 'heterophony', which is a linguistic concept evoking a multiplicity of *different* voices. Chang seems to refer to the latter meaning of the term.

<sup>51</sup> Gabriel M. Rubio Navarro, *Música y escritura en Alejo Carpentier* (Salamanca: Universidad de Alicante, 1999), p. 12.

significant efforts to study the role played by music within literary culture and the application of literary theories to musical texts.<sup>52</sup> For researchers in this interdisciplinary field:

[...] bringing literary and musical criticism together produces not so much a mutual accommodation as a shared revision of critical practice. Indeed, music itself provides a powerful metaphor for the kind of interdisciplinary scrutiny that emphasizes the vertical or 'homophonic' relationships between art works in different media, rather than viewing them horizontally or 'polyphonically', with only intermittent attention to moments of harmonious coincidence (p. 2).

A significant step to institutionalise interdisciplinary research in literature and music was the foundation of the International Association for Word and Music Studies in 1997. The WMA, presently led by Walter Bernhart, Michael Halliwell, Suzanne Lodato, Werner Wolf, David Mosley and Lawrence Kramer, has successfully brought musicologists and literary critics together through conferences and the publication of the Word and Music Studies Series.

Two texts by WMA scholars usefully exemplify opposite approaches. Werner Wolf's *The Musicalization of Fiction: A Study in the Theory and History of Intermediality* (1999) outlines a general theory of intermediality and its fundamental forms. Wolf defines musicalized fiction as 'essentially a special case of covert intermedial **imitation**: the imitation of music in a narrative text', which 'consists primarily in a particular shaping of the level of the *discours*, in some cases also of the *histoire* and its structure.'<sup>53</sup> Wolf focuses on defining and classifying musico-literary relationships, presenting a series of criteria to recognise musicalized texts. He emphasises that a 'specification that similarities or analogies to music be "verifiable or at least convincingly identifiable" in the fictional text has to be made in order to exclude misleading suggestions of a musicalization (p. 53).' Some scholars – I include myself –

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<sup>52</sup> Delia da Sousa Correa, 'Introduction', in *Phrase and Subject: Studies in Literature and Music*, ed. by Delia da Sousa Correa (London: Modern Humanities Research Association and Maney Publishing, 2006), pp. 1-10 (pp. 1-2).

<sup>53</sup> Werner Wolf, *The Musicalization of Fiction: A Study in the Theory and History of Intermediality* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999), pp. 51-52, bold and italics in the original.

find that Wolf's sheer rationalist approach does not engage with some important subjective qualities of these arts.

Peter Dayan, in his book *Music Writing Literature, from Sand via Debussy to Derrida* (2006), criticises the common trends in musicology and literary studies that seek to identify objectively verifiable features (here, he appears to implicate Wolf's critical style).<sup>54</sup> Dayan aims to rehabilitate 'that other way of writing [...] that refused to recognize clear boundaries between the literary, the critical, and the musical (p. ix).' Dayan focuses on texts written by Sand, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Proust, Barthes, Derrida and other French figures, in which literature and music are closely dependant on each other. Dayan proposes that these writings share a style which 'uses music to compose a definition of literature, and literature to compose a definition of music (p. 131)'.

While these texts are not of specific relevance to my thesis, they have had a general importance in helping me formulate my thoughts about the relationships between the two disciplines, particularly during the more exploratory stage of my research.

Frédérique Arroyas's exploration of readers' dealings with musical references in literary works has been important to define my own position as a critic. In her article 'When Is a Text Like Music?' (2001), Arroyas examines the effects of musical references in a text, the juxtaposition of different art forms in the mind of the reader, the integration of features of a musical object within a literary text and the comparison of musical and narrative forms. Using Roger Laporte's 1970 novel *Fugue* as a case study, she examines how a 'blended' space may be constructed and lead readers to conceptualize a 'literary fugue'. Crucially, she notes that musico-literary analogies may

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<sup>54</sup> Peter Dayan, *Music Writing Literature, from Sand via Debussy to Derrida* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p. viii.



be left unexplored due to factors such as ‘lack of sensitivity to music, lack of technical knowledge and the sheer work involved in attempting interart analogies’.<sup>55</sup>

At the time of the submission of this thesis, no interdisciplinary studies in music and literature from the Spanish-speaking countries have been published by other members of the International Association for Word and Music Studies. My research therefore aims to add to Word and Music Studies and to scholarship in Latin American literature and musicology.<sup>56</sup>

A summary of my thesis and a reflection on my interdisciplinary approach is included in an article I co-wrote with my supervisors Delia da Sousa Correa and Robert Samuels, which was published in the 2009 ‘Crossing the Divides: Multi-Disciplinary Approaches to Teaching and Researching English Studies’ special issue of the journal *Working with English*, produced in collaboration with the HE Academy’s English Subject Centre. A shorter version of Chapter Two (in Spanish) was published in 2010 by the musicological journal *Resonancias*. An earlier and shorter version of Chapter Four was published in 2007 by the Forum of the International Association for Words and Music Studies.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Frédérique Arroyas, ‘When Is a Text Like Music?’, in *Essays on the Song Cycle and on Defining the Field*, ed. by Walter Bernhart and Werner Wolf with David L. Mosley, Word and Music Studies Series, 3 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001), pp. 81-99 (p. 98).

<sup>56</sup> The latest major international conference on Carpentier, ‘Alejo Carpentier, la emancipación y las revoluciones latinoamericanas’ (Havana, April 2010), focused on the effect of political revolutions upon his fiction. No paper discussed his use of music as an agent to convey ideology, so I hope my thesis will contribute to further work on this topic. This event commemorated thirty years since Carpentier’s death and two hundred years since the start of the independence movements in Latin America. For a report on this conference, see Mabel Machado, ‘Nuevas lecturas de la historia como tema permanente’, *La Jiribilla*, 8 (24-30 April 2010), <[http://www.lajiribilla.co.cu/2010/n468\\_04/468\\_23.html](http://www.lajiribilla.co.cu/2010/n468_04/468_23.html)> [accessed 8 May 2010].

<sup>57</sup> Delia da Sousa Correa, Katia Chornik, and Robert Samuels, ‘Literature and Music: Interdisciplinary Research and Teaching at The Open University’, *Working With English: Modern and Medieval Language, Literature and Drama*, 5 (2009), 50-61 <[http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/~aezweb/working\\_with\\_english/5/index.htm](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/~aezweb/working_with_english/5/index.htm)> [accessed 3 January 2010]; Katia Chornik, ‘Ideas evolucionistas en “Los orígenes de la música y la música primitiva”’, un ensayo inédito de Alejo Carpentier’, *Resonancias*, 26 (2010), 41-55 (also available online: <http://www.resonancias.cl/resonancias-no-26>); Katia Chornik, ‘Musical Analogies in Alejo Carpentier’s *El acoso*’, *International Association for Word and Music Studies* (2007), <<http://wordmusicstudies.org/forum2007/forum1.htm>> [accessed 9 May 2008].



## II. Evolutionary ideas in 'Los orígenes de la música y la música primitiva'

In 'El hombre anterior al hombre' (1958), Carpentier shows that the impact of the theory of evolution on the search for man's origins is ongoing, even though some of the specific Darwinian debates may have been left behind:

Bien olvidadas están las controversias que promovieron, en su tiempo, las teorías de Darwin. ¡Cuántas refutaciones teológicas se publicaron entonces! ¡Cuántos chistes pudieron escucharse, acerca de los 'abuelos monos'!<sup>58</sup>

The controversies generated by Darwin's theories at that time are long forgotten. So many theological refutations were published then! So many jokes about the 'grandfather apes' could be heard!

In this article, Carpentier highlights the work of contemporary palaeontologists, particularly that of the French Jesuit and palaeontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who enthusiastically embraced the concept of evolution in *The Phenomenon of Man* (1955):

One after the other all the fields of human knowledge have been shaken and carried away by the same under-water current in the direction of the study of some *development*. Is evolution a theory, a system or a hypothesis? It is much more: it is a general condition to which all theories, all hypotheses, all systems must bow and which they must satisfy henceforward if they are to be thinkable and true. Evolution is a light illuminating all facts, a curve that all lines must follow.<sup>59</sup>

Teilhard de Chardin draws extensively on the work of Lamarck and Darwin for his own evolutionary theory, which focuses on the physical world and human consciousness. He coined the concept of hominisation, defined as 'the individual and instantaneous leap from instinct to thought, but it is also, in a wider sense, the progressive phyletic spiritualisation in human civilisation of all the forces contained in the animal world (p. 180).'

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<sup>58</sup> Carpentier, 'El hombre anterior al hombre', p. 16.

<sup>59</sup> Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, trans. by Bernard Wall (London: Collins, 1959 [1955]), pp. 218-19.



In 'El hombre anterior al hombre', Carpentier uses Teilhard de Chardin's idea of hominisation when referring to man's achievement in becoming anthropocentric. This in turn confers 'inequívocas cartas de nobleza al "abuelo mono" (p. 17)' [unequivocal patent of nobility for the 'grandfather ape']. Interestingly, Carpentier also uses Teilhard de Chardin's concept when discussing the reception of twentieth-century musical works in his 1972 *Times Literary Supplement* article 'A Feeling for Music':

The public has turned its back on Stravinsky's theoretical writings and ended up by finding its now essential activity of emotional participation in an increasing 'hominization' (I am using Teilhard de Chardin's term) of the three puppets in *Petrushka*, in the ritual sacrifice of the Chosen Virgin, Iphigenia's Scythian sister, [and] in the final scene (George Auric described it as "bouleversant") of *Le Noces*.<sup>60</sup>

Carpentier, in his discussions of primeval music in 'Los orígenes de la música y la música primitiva' and *Los pasos perdidos*, employs the prehistoric as a means to discuss the contemporary, both in relation to humankind and music. As mentioned in Chapter One, Carpentier uses extensively the widely circulating concept of 'the primitive', and equates prehistoric humankind with current-day non-Western people. In both texts, he highlights the work of Erich von Hornbostel and Curt Sachs, two highly influential comparatists, and draws on the ideas of other European precursors of modern ethnomusicology, Jules Combarieu and André Schaeffner.<sup>61</sup> Carpentier does not mention by name Richard Wallaschek, one of the founders of comparative musicology. It is difficult to believe that he did not encounter Wallaschek's well-known book *Primitive Music* (1893), directly or indirectly, for his own discussion contains a striking affinity of ideas about the origin of music in rhythmical impulse, the simultaneous

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<sup>60</sup> Alejo Carpentier, 'A Feeling for Music', *The Times*, 22 September 1972, pp. 1097-99 (p. 1098). To my knowledge, this article is Carpentier's only contribution to a British media.

<sup>61</sup> For a list of the main researchers worldwide during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Stephen Blum, 'European Musical Terminology and the Music of Africa', in *Comparative Musicology and the Anthropology of Music*, ed. by Bruno Nettl and Philip V. Bohlman (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991), pp. 3-36 (pp. 4-9).

emergence of speech and music, the role of onomatopoeia, and a similar objection to the Darwinian explanation about the courtship function of prehistoric music.<sup>62</sup>

‘Los orígenes de la música’ and *Los pasos perdidos* largely coincide in their argument about primeval music. Yet the novel includes a key criticism of the methods of ethnomusicological research that is not present in the other text, in tone with the redefinitions of ethnomusicology that took place in the 1950s.

According to Philip Bohlman in his article ‘Ethnomusicology’s Challenge to the Canon; the Canon’s Challenge to Ethnomusicology’ (1992), self-criticism became essential to the development of the field (renamed in the 1950s as ‘ethnomusicology’), as scholars became critical of the gap between European musical thought and non-Western musical practice, and sought to halt the appropriation of non-Western musics.<sup>63</sup> One of the key figures in these radical redefinitions was Jaap Kunst, who in his book *Musicologica* (1950, enlarged as *Ethnomusicology*, 1959) proposed:

The study-object of ethnomusicology, or, as it originally was called: comparative musicology, is the *traditional* music and musical instruments of all cultural strata of mankind, from the so-called primitive peoples to the civilized nations. Our science, therefore, investigates all tribal and folk music and every kind of non-Western music. Besides, it studies as well the sociological aspects of music, as the phenomena of musical acculturation, i.e. the hybridizing influence of alien musical elements.<sup>64</sup>

The shifts in the ethnomusicological field occurred at a similar time as Claude Lévi-Strauss’s reformulations of ethnographical research. In his article ‘El Kodachrome y la

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<sup>62</sup> Richard Wallaschek, *Primitive Music: An Inquiry into the Origin and Development of Music, Songs, Instruments, Dances, and Pantomimes of Savage Races* (London: Aberdeen University Press, 1893). *Primitive Music* was originally published in English, a language that Carpentier certainly read. Significant parts of this book were first published in an article co-written by Richard Wallaschek and James McKeen Cattell, ‘On the Origin of Music’, *Mind*, 16 (1891), 375-88. This article was later contested by Spencer in ‘On the Origin of Music’, *Mind*, 64 (1891), 535-37.

<sup>63</sup> Philip V. Bohlman, ‘Ethnomusicology’s Challenge to the Canon; the Canon’s Challenge to Ethnomusicology’, in *Disciplining Music: Musicology and Its Canons*, ed. by Katherine Bergeron and Philip V. Bohlman (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), pp. 116-36 (pp. 119-20).

<sup>64</sup> Jaap Kunst, *Ethnomusicology: A Study of Its Nature, Its Problems, Methods and Representative Personalities to Which Is Added a Bibliography* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1959 [1950]), p. 1. Quoted in Bohlman, ‘Ethnomusicology’s Challenge to the Canon; the Canon’s Challenge to Ethnomusicology’, p. 121.

etnografía' (1956), Carpentier supports Lévi-Strauss's critique of the exotic and plea for professional standards formulated in his *Tristes tropiques* (1955):

Alentados por la afición creciente del público a los libros y películas de viaje, muchos hombres animosos se dirigen a países remotos, armados de cámaras fotográficas, en busca de 'documentos' aptos para ser presentados como 'sensacionales descubrimientos'. [...] Pero, los que suelen practicar aquello que llama Lévi-Strauss "un boyscoutismo de nuevo cuño", no se sienten con la conciencia muy tranquila. Comprenden que su empresa necesita alguna justificación de tipo "científico". Y para lograrlo se erigen de pronto en etnógrafos y arqueólogos, fijándose, sobre la marcha y con lo que vaya apareciendo al azar, unos objetivos cada vez más respetables [...] La etnografía de hoy – añade Lévi-Strauss – ha dejado de ser una aventura, es un oficio.<sup>65</sup>

Encouraged by the public's growing fondness for travel books and films, many keen men head for remote countries, equipped with photographic cameras, in search for suitable 'documents' to be presented as 'sensational discoveries'. [...] But, those who practice what Lévi-Strauss calls 'a new style of Boy Scouts' activity', do not keep their consciences very quiet. They understand that their enterprise needs a certain 'scientific'-type justification. And to achieve this, they suddenly turn into ethnographers and archaeologists, setting themselves more and more respectable goals as they go along and with whatever randomly appears to hand. The ethnography of today – adds Lévi-Strauss – has stopped being an adventure; it is a profession.

Besides the methodology issue, the different systems of classification of instruments mentioned in the two texts strongly suggest that *Los pasos perdidos* was written later. 'Los orígenes de la música' refers to the scheme developed by Sachs and von Hornbostel in 1914, whereas the novel mentions 'los últimos métodos de clasificación, basados en la evolución morfológica de los instrumentos y no en la manera de resonar y ser tocados' ['the latest methods of classification, based on the morphological evolution of instruments and not on how they sound and are played'],<sup>66</sup> which Montoya Campuzano has rightly identified as André Schaeffner's 1932 system.<sup>67</sup> Although

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<sup>65</sup> Alejo Carpentier, 'El Kodachrome y la etnografía' (1956), in *Los confines del hombre*, Obras Completas Series, 16 vols (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1983-94), XVI (1994), 99-103 (pp. 99-100). For an examination of the influence of Lévi-Strauss's *Tristes tropiques* on Carpentier, see Eduardo González, *Alejo Carpentier: el tiempo del hombre* (Caracas: Monte Avila Editores, 1978), pp. 167-98.

<sup>66</sup> Alejo Carpentier, *Los pasos perdidos* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1991), p. 26. Further references to the Spanish edition are given in brackets in the main text. Alejo Carpentier, *The Lost Steps*, trans. by Harriet de Onís (London: Gollancz, 1956), p. 26. Further references to the English edition are given in brackets in the main text.

<sup>67</sup> The classification system of von Hornbostel and Sachs focuses on the way sound is produced. See Klaus Wachsmann and others, 'Instruments, classification of', in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. by Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell, 2nd edn, 29 vols (London: Macmillan, 2001), XII, 418-28, and Margaret J. Kartomi, *On Concepts and Classifications of Musical Instruments* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 167-74. Montoya Campuzano describes the French

Schaeffner's scheme would not have been particularly recent at the time of the publication of the novel, it is still considerably newer than that of Sachs and von Hornbostel.

I shall now summarise the most relevant nineteenth- and early twentieth-century research on the origins of music that relate to Carpentier's argument.

### Theories in Europe and Latin America

Herbert Spencer proposes in his essay 'On the Origin and Function of Music' (1857) that enhanced speech provided the foundation from which prehistoric music developed. Spencer arrives at this reasoning after noting that sounds span a greater tonal range and volume when speech becomes emotional: 'These vocal peculiarities which indicate excited feelings *are those which especially distinguish song from ordinary speech.*'<sup>68</sup> Given his evolutionary view of society, Spencer equates 'savage' people of his present time with one of the past historical stages of a more developed society.<sup>69</sup> He proposes that the development of a society entails an enhancement of language:

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musicologist's system as 'el mérito más importante de Schaeffner para el ámbito de la musicología' [the most important merit of Schaeffner in the domain of musicology]. Montoya Campuzano, '*Los pasos perdidos* y las teorías sobre el origen de la música', p. 60, n. 3. However, Margaret Kartomi plays down its importance:

Unlike the Hornbostel and Sachs classification, Schaeffner's scheme has not been translated into English and has had little impact outside France. Its comparative novelty or, in other words, its lack of continuity with past classifications, the greater prestige of Hornbostel and Sachs as scholars, and the greater exposure of Hornbostel and Sachs's classification mediated against the widespread acceptance of Schaeffner's scheme, despite its elegantly logical quality.

Kartomi, *On Concepts and Classifications of Musical Instruments*, p. 176.

<sup>68</sup> Herbert Spencer, 'On the Origin and Function of Music', in *Essays: Scientific, Political, and Speculative*, 3 vols (London: Longman, 1858), I, 359-84 (p. 368), italics in the original.

<sup>69</sup> Spencer is known as the main theorist of the so-called Social Darwinism, which proposes that society is subject to the same laws of natural selection as plants and animals. As summarised by Richard W. Hadden, Spencer took from biology the following claims or assumptions: the critical attributes of individuals and collectivities emerge from competition either among individuals or between collective populations; social evolution involves movements from undifferentiated structures to differentiated ones, marked by interrelated functions; and the differences among individuals and social systems are a function of having to adapt to varying environmental conditions. Richard W. Hadden, *Sociological Theory: An Introduction to the Classical Tradition* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 1997), pp. 35-36. For a study on the relationship between Spencer's and Darwin's works, see Valerie A. Haines, 'Spencer, Darwin, and the Question of Reciprocal Influence', *Journal of the History of Biology*, 24 (1991), 409-31.



[...] the dance-chants of savage tribes are very monotonous; and in virtue of their monotony are much more nearly allied to ordinary speech than are the songs of civilized races. [...] we see that the earliest vocal music of which we have any account differed much less from emotional speech than does the vocal music of our days (pp. 371-72).

In *The Descent of Man* (1871), Darwin opposes Spencer's explanation of the relationship between language and music, and attributes musical qualities to the sounds produced by animals. He concludes that ancestral music preceded speech and had a courtship function, as

[...] musical notes and rhythm were first acquired by the male or female progenitors of mankind for the sake of charming the opposite sex. Thus musical tones became firmly associated with some of the strongest passions an animal is capable of feeling, and are consequently used instinctively, or through association, when strong emotions are expressed in speech.<sup>70</sup>

In *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872), Darwin establishes close links between the actions and feelings of man and animals, expanding on the idea of 'animal music':

That animals utter musical notes is familiar to every one, as we may daily hear in the singing of birds. It is a more remarkable fact that an ape, one of the Gibbons, produces an exact octave of musical sounds, ascending and descending the scale by half-tones [...]. We can plainly perceive, with some of the lower animals, that the males employ their voices to please the females, and that they themselves take pleasure in their own vocal utterances.<sup>71</sup>

Spencer's and Darwin's ideas were particularly important for theories of music's origins around the turn of the twentieth century, as Alexander Rehding notes in his article 'The Quest for the Origins of Music in Germany Circa 1900' (2000).<sup>72</sup> He explains that the founders of modern musicology (Adler, Hanslick, Jadassohn and Stumpf, among others) followed an ideology that invested special significance in the point of departure

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<sup>70</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, ed. by James Moore and Adrian Desmond (London: Penguin Books, 2004 [1871]), pp. 638-39, n. 39. For a study on the reception of Darwin's ideas on the origin of music, see Geoffrey Miller, 'Evolution of Human Music through Sexual Selection', in *The Origins of Music*, ed. by Nils L. Wallin, Björn Merker and Steven Brown (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2000), pp. 329-60.

<sup>71</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, ed. by Joe Cain and Sharon Messenger (London: Penguin, 2009 [1872]), pp. 87-88.

<sup>72</sup> Alexander Rehding, 'The Quest for the Origins of Music in Germany Circa 1900', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 53 (2000), 345-85 (p. 350).

(*Ursprungsphilosophie*). For Rehding, all the different approaches to the question of music's origins – the reconstructions of the social principles of music, the collections of specimens of folk music, the examinations of early music manuscripts, the searches for the principles that made tonality sustainable – converged in two main points:

First, no matter what kind of evidence each group of musicologists had at its disposal, they all looked for the principle that had brought music to life before its history proper began. And second, the belief that the origins of music would reveal its essence is common to all; all shared the resonances of purity, simplicity, authenticity, and stability (p. 379).

Rehding notes that numerous scholars investigating music's origins reacted very negatively to the advent of atonality (particularly to Schoenberg's music), lamenting the 'decline of music' and 'the annulment of the essence of music', among other allegations (pp. 379-80).

Among the most influential schools of thought around the turn of the twentieth century was comparative musicology. Comparatists aimed to outline the relationships between world music systems using evolutionary models and genetic classification in biology. They grouped cultural traits into geographical circles of distribution representing their evolutionary stages of development.<sup>73</sup> Erich von Hornbostel and others associated with the Berlin School saw the potential of pure primeval expression for Western art music, as Bohlman explains: 'Their definitions of comparative musicology stressed this value and these influences, and the praxis of research was often designed so that the musical capital produced through investment in non-Western musics transferred directly to the store of European musical thought.'<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Timothy Rice, 'Comparative Musicology', in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. by Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell, 2nd edn, 29 vols (London: Macmillan, 2001), VI, 178-79. Carl Stumpf, Erich M. von Hornbostel, Otto Abraham, Marius Schneider, Mieczyslaw Kolinski, Curt Sachs, Robert Lach, Richard Wallaschek, Siegfried Nadel, Walter Graf and Albert Wellek are some of the most important comparatists.

<sup>74</sup> Bohlman, 'Ethnomusicology's Challenge to the Canon; the Canon's Challenge to Ethnomusicology', p. 120.

Richard Wallaschek dismissed the Darwinian idea of attributing musical qualities to the sounds of birds and other animals, and the attempts of constructing a bridge between the spiritual life of man and animals. In his *Primitive Music*, he asserts that

[...] it is much easier to show that primitive man still is, in reference to his mental state, an animal. For this view at least we have a more trustworthy collection of empiric facts than for the opinion that the animal is already man, or that there is no connection between the spiritual life of both (p. 279).

Wallaschek produces psychological and biological evidence against Darwin's explanation that human music and its accompanying feelings of pleasure developed from courtship sounds in our progenitors (pp. 242-48). He also shows physiological evidence against an unnamed previous theory that proposed that human music should be understood as the direct outcome of birdsong. 'We have', he claims, 'never heard of an imitation of the *melody* in birds' song among savages. They imitate every bird's call, but not what we call the melody of the singing birds proper (p. 248)'. Arguably, Wallaschek could be referring to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's concept of music as art imitative of natural sounds. In his *Essay on the Origin of Languages* (c.1760), Rousseau proposes that the first musical expressions were melodic and originated from passions: 'Melody, by imitating the inflections of the voice, expresses complaints, cries of sadness or of joy, threats and moans; all the vocal signs of the passions are within its scope.'<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 'Essay on the Origin of Languages in which Melody and Music Imitation are Treated' (c.1760), in *Essay on the Origin of Languages and Writings Related to Music*, trans. by John T. Scott, ed. by John T. Scott, Collected Writings of Rousseau Series, 13 vols (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1990-2009), VII (1998), 289-332 (p. 322). Anthony Seeger notes that most ethnological research in the last two centuries relates to two of Rousseau's observations: 'the possible universality of musical rules, or physical laws of music', and 'the effects the songs have on people are not limited to the physical effects of the sounds themselves but include their cultural interpretation.' Anthony Seeger, 'Styles of Musical Ethnography', in *Comparative Musicology and the Anthropology of Music*, ed. by Bruno Nettl and Philip V. Bohlman (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991), pp. 342-55 (p. 347). In an interview, Carpentier declared his knowledge and 'gran admiración' [great admiration] for Rousseau's work, including his writings on music. 'Entrevista en Radio Televisión Francesa', p. 77.

Wallaschek seeks the origin of music in the instinctual use of rhythm arising from primeval man's 'general appetite for exercise (p. 231),' and proposes a relationship with musical form: 'Rhythm is the initiative force which leads us on to any arrangement of notes whatever (p. 234).' He opposes Spencer's idea that enhanced speech provided the foundation from which prehistoric music developed, pointing out that 'Among savages primitive vocal music reveals in many cases no connection with language, but is simply a succession of musical sounds sung by the voice (p. 252).'

Wallaschek suggests that music's evolution involves mental progress: 'Music is an expression of emotion, speech the expression of thought [...] It may be, however, that in a very primitive stage of mental development thought and emotion have not yet become clearly differentiated (p. 253).'

As Wagner did earlier, Wallaschek proposes that music and language originated simultaneously:

I think then that music and speech did not arise the one from the other, but that both arose from (or together with) an identical primitive stage in one of their common elements. Hence it happens that in inquiring into the origin of music we necessarily come into contact with primitive language, and in inquiring into the origin of speech we come into contact with primitive music, or, more correctly speaking, with the corresponding sounds. Primitive human utterance, using sound-metaphors and onomatopoeia in order to make itself intelligible, may resemble primitive musical tones; nevertheless an early separation of distinct tones and indistinct sounds seems to have taken place, not as a transition from the one as prior to the other as succeeding, but as a divergence from a primitive state which is, strictly speaking, neither of the two (p. 254).

Much of ethnomusicological research in Latin America has been concerned with the study of origins, as Gerard Béhague points out in his essay 'Reflections on the Ideological History of Latin American Ethnomusicology' (1991).<sup>76</sup> Béhague indicates that early Latin American practitioners shared interests with the comparative musicologists and ethnographers linked to the Berlin School, focusing on oral cultural phenomena (pp. 56-57). Béhague highlights that

[...] one of the most innovative factors in ethnomusicological research in Latin America over the last thirty years or so has been the awareness on the part of numerous

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<sup>76</sup> Gerard Béhague, 'Reflections on the Ideological History of Latin American Ethnomusicology', in *Comparative Musicology and the Anthropology of Music*, ed. by Bruno Nettl and Philip V. Bohlman (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991), pp. 56-68 (p. 57).

researchers of the need for firsthand knowledge of and experience in the very musical traditions that they seek to describe and interpret (p. 57).

Isabel Aretz, in her *Historia de la etnomusicología en América Latina* (1991), adds that Latin American ethnomusicologists have used a combination of synchronic and diachronic methodologies. She notes that local researchers have generally viewed their outputs as having vital importance for the development of the sciences and the arts, as well as for the general education of the local population.<sup>77</sup>

Carlos Vega, founder of the Gabinete de Musicología Indígena at the Museo de Ciencias Naturales in Buenos Aires (the main training centre for Latin American ethnomusicologists), used comparative musicology methods and adopted evolutionary ideas. For instance, in his *Los instrumentos musicales aborígenes y criollos de la Argentina* (1946), Vega distinguishes ethnographic from folkloric creations or institutions according to the prevalence and evolution of 'survivals' (understood as goods that are alien to large leading centres) in 'superior' and 'inferior' groups.<sup>78</sup>

Another highly influential Latin American ethnomusicologist who employed evolutionary ideas was Fernando Ortiz, best known for his extensive work on Afro-Cuban culture. In his early works, Ortiz applied the concept of 'cultural regression' to Afro-Cuban music and dance, placing blacks and other non-Caucasians in the lowest positions of an imagined evolutionary intellectual and cultural hierarchy. From the mid-1930s onwards, Ortiz valued Afro-Cuban culture as a living example of humanity's distant past and as a unique heritage, which could provide a basis for a renovated Cuban national culture, as Robin Moore notes.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Isabel Aretz, *Historia de la etnomusicología en América Latina: Desde la época precolombina hasta nuestros días* (Caracas: FUNDEF-CONAC-OEA, 1991), p. 18.

<sup>78</sup> Carlos Vega, *Los instrumentos musicales aborígenes y criollos de la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Centurión, 1946), p. 255.

<sup>79</sup> Robin Moore, 'Representations of Afrocuban Expressive Culture in the Writings of Fernando Ortiz', *Latin American Music Review*, 15 (1994), 32-54 (pp. 37-38). Note that Ortiz lists Darwin's *The Expression of the Emotions* and Wallaschek's *Primitive Music* in the bibliography of his comprehensive treaty of Afro-Cuban music, *La africanía de la música folklórica de Cuba* (Havana: Publicaciones del

Ortiz and Carpentier were founding members of the Afro-Cuban movement, which influenced all domains of elite and popular art in the 1920s and 30s. Both men collaborated and influenced each other's work, engaging in detailed correspondence over their discoveries about music.<sup>80</sup> In *La música en Cuba*, Carpentier makes explicit use of Ortiz's research, applying his late valorisations of Afro-Cuban culture as well as his concept of 'transculturation' to the discussions of musical syncretism.

Prior to my examination of Carpentier's 'Los orígenes de la música y la música primitiva', I will give some details about the document itself.

#### **'Los orígenes de la música' – description and editorial considerations**

'Los orígenes de la música y la música primitiva' is an undated nineteen-page typescript written on thin typewriter paper (one side only). It forms part of the Colección Carpentier, a large set of unpublished documents belonging to the Fundación Carpentier. The Biblioteca Nacional José Martí (Havana) currently holds this collection.

The latest event mentioned by Carpentier I have been able to date is his trip to Haiti, which took place in 1943. He must have written the text around that time, as he refers to his trip as 'recent'.

At present, there is no data to establish the exact date of the typescript from its bibliographic classification or from the type of paper and typewriter used, as documents in this collection are not classified by these means.

There may be connections between 'Los orígenes de la música' and the following unpublished items belonging to the same collection:

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Ministerio de Educación, 1950). In his book *Los bailes y el teatro de los negros en el folklore de Cuba* (Havana: Ediciones Cardenas, 1951), Ortiz also uses Wallaschek's study.

<sup>80</sup> For an examination of the correspondence between Ortiz and Carpentier, see Wilfredo Cancio Isla, 'Cartas cruzadas entre Ortiz y Carpentier', *La gaceta de Cuba*, 6 (1994), 2-7. For a study of the Afro-Cuban movement, see Robin D. Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness: Afrocubanismo and Artistic Revolution in Havana, 1920-1940* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997).

- 1) Working material for *Los pasos perdidos*: ‘El libro de la Gran Sabana: Hojas dispersas’ (MS CM 186) and ‘Santa Mónica de los Venados’ (MS CM 96);
- 2) An undated and untitled three-page text dealing with organology (MS CM 18);
- 3) Carpentier’s notes for his lectures at the Havana University, ‘Primer curso de historia de la música: Orígenes de la música medieval’ (MS CM 12, dated 1941).

I believe ‘Los orígenes de la música’ is a draft for a talk or a radio programme script. It has a number of incomplete sentences and extension marks suggesting sections where Carpentier might have improvised or added further comments. There are several notes to show instruments and play excerpts of records. The labels of the latter are curious – ‘Record 1’ followed by ‘Record I’ and ‘Record G’. These suggest Carpentier may have taken his musical examples from a talk he had presented somewhere else, perhaps at the Museum of Ethnography in Port-au-Prince, and then enlarged it to make a broadcast or public lecture in Cuba or in Venezuela, where he lived from 1945.

Both in my transcription and in my translation of this document – which are found in the Appendix – I have included concise information about events, musical works and instruments mentioned by Carpentier. The grammar of the original is often awkward. I made no alterations in the transcription but some amendments in the translation. In both versions, I standardised Carpentier’s inconsistent punctuation. In the analysis that follows, I will refer to the page numbers of the original typescript.

### **‘Los orígenes de la música y la música primitiva’ – a critical study**

Carpentier begins his discussion by dismissing a theory that explains the origin of music as an attempt to imitate birds. Such theory gained support ‘en círculos de músicos poco adictos al estudio científico de las cuestiones (p. 1)’ [in musical circles detached from

scientific studies of these matters]. Like Wallaschek, Carpentier does not attribute this theory to any specified author.<sup>81</sup>

Carpentier strongly believes there is a linguistic misunderstanding in the use of the term birdsong: 'El grito de las aves es tan poco canto, como poco canto es el aullido del perro en la noche, o el relincho del caballo enardecido (p. 2)' [Birdcalls are no more singing than the howling of a dog in the night, or the neighing of an excited horse].<sup>82</sup> For Carpentier, singing implies the notion of beauty – 'creación puramente humana (p. 2)' [a purely human creation] – as well as 'un deseo de crear algo gratuito, desprovisto de utilidad, por mero placer (p. 3)' [a desire to create something gratuitous, devoid of use, for mere pleasure].<sup>83</sup> He dismisses any relation between an animal cry and an aesthetic object:

Es de suponerse que el hombre primitivo no haya visto en el grito de las aves, sino una manifestación más de la vida que lo circundaba. [...] No creo que un mono aún perteneciente a especie muy evolucionada, haya sentido nunca, al escuchar a un ruiseñor, la emoción poética de Sigfrido en las selvas del Rhin. Atribuir al hombre prehistórico el don de emocionarse ante un jilguero, es sobrestimar el valor de la condición humana. Y, aún más, creer que ese hombre prehistórico llegara a concebir el pensamiento, muy complejo de por sí, de imitar ese canto para lograr una expresión lírica, casi abstracta, fuera de la palabra (pp. 2-3).

It can be assumed that primitive man did not consider birdcalls as anything other than another sign of surrounding life. [...] I do not believe that a monkey, still belonging to a very evolved species, would ever have felt, while listening to a nightingale, the poetic emotion of Siegfried in the Rhine woods. To attribute prehistoric man with the gift of

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<sup>81</sup> Carpentier may have also come across Curt Sachs's *Our Musical Heritage*, which dismisses several unnamed theories on the origins of music:

[...] wrong, so far, are all the many theories presented on a more or less scientific basis – the theories that man has imitated the warbling of birds, that he wanted to please the opposite sex, that his singing derived from drawn-out signaling shouts, that he arrived at music via some coordinated, rhythmical teamwork, and other speculative hypotheses.

Curt Sachs, *Our Musical Heritage: A Short History of Music*, 2nd edn (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1955 [1948]), p. 1.

<sup>82</sup> Contemporary evolutionists have also addressed this question of terminology. Brown, Merker and Wallin note:

Just as the lack of a clear definition has not prevented musicologists from advancing our understanding of music, so too lack of a categorical means of sorting animal "songs" from animal "calls" has not prevented biologists from learning much about the more structurally complex forms of animal vocal displays – whether called song or not – that might in fact be relevant to our attempts to understand the beginnings and foundations of music in the course of anthropogenesis.

Brown, Merker, and Wallin, 'An Introduction to Evolutionary Musicology', p. 7.

<sup>83</sup> Here Carpentier seems to follow Oscar Wilde's dictum 'All art is quite useless'. Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Grey* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 1992 [1891]), p. 6.



being moved by a goldfinch is to overestimate the value of the human condition. As it would be, even more, to believe that prehistoric man could have devised the thought, very complex in itself, of imitating that bird's call to achieve a lyric expression, almost abstract, beyond words.

Carpentier uses Wagner, who set his music dramas in a non-specific antiquity, as a means to discuss man's predecessors. He is most likely referring to the 'Forest Murmurs' scene from Act II of *Siegfried* (1876), in which Siegfried tries to mimic a bird that ironically is able to produce both words and music:

Hei! Ich versuch's,  
sing ihm nach:  
auf dem Rohr tön ich ihm ähnlich!  
Entrat ich der Worte,  
achte der Weise,  
sing ich so seine Sprache,  
versteh ich wohl auch was *es* spricht.

I'll be that bird's  
mockingbird;  
let this reed rival your piping.  
Your language I lack,  
but your chanting enchants me.  
If I sing as you warble,  
perhaps I shall talk in your tongue.

Alas, Siegfried is unsuccessful in his attempt:

Das tönt nicht recht;  
auf dem Rohre taugt  
die wonnige Weise mir nicht.  
Vöglein, mich dünkt,  
ich bleibe dumm:  
von dir lernt sich's nicht leicht!

That was ill done,  
and the reed is wrong  
for songs such as I want to sing.  
Songster, I think  
I am too slow.  
I shan't learn it from you.<sup>84</sup>

Like in the mention of the 'grandfather ape' in his article 'El hombre anterior al hombre', Carpentier refers to 'primitive' or prehistoric humans and monkeys indistinctly. This brings to mind the many stereotyped popular-culture readings of Darwinism from the nineteenth century onwards that present *Homo sapiens* as the

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<sup>84</sup> Richard Wagner, *Siegfried*, trans. by Rudolph Sabor (London: Phaidon Press, 1997), pp. 120-23.

genetic descendant of apes, rather than two different species joined back to a common ancestor.<sup>85</sup> Carpentier's assumption that a monkey is unable to feel emotions is very un-Darwinian. On the other hand, the opposition of the primeval to Wagner suggests an evolutionary gloss that shows the German composer as the peak of emotional music. Readings of music history of this kind were not uncommon in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Certainly, Wallaschek in his *Primitive Music* presents a 'Retrospective view from the most primitive times up to Wagner':

What a length of time has not elapsed since the first attempt to represent the events of chase and war before the assembled company in order to induce it to participate in common action [...] till at last the daughters of the Rhine rise from the depths of the holy river, Sigfried's [sic] horn resounds, and Walhall, the resplendent seat of the gods, shines in sublime grandeur.

This is for the present the last stage in the long line of evolution, more varied and more eloquent in the history of the musical drama than in any other domain of human accomplishments (pp. 287-89).

Following his discussion of birdcall, Carpentier refers to the ideas proposed by Curt Sachs (no specific text is mentioned) and Jules Combarieu in his *Histoire de la musique* (1913-19) ('Los origenes de la música', pp. 3-4). Carpentier agrees with Sachs's idea that the origin of dance lies in the movements generated by basic human emotions. He also agrees with Combarieu's ideas about the religious and magical essence of primeval chant, seen as an emotional expression provoked by the mysteries of nature (he does not mention Combarieu's idea that primeval visual and rhythmic arts imitate aspects and habits of animals mimetically, yet he does incorporate it in *Los pasos perdidos*<sup>86</sup>).

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<sup>85</sup> One may take, for instance, the satirical *Punch* illustration 'Monkeyana' showing an ape wearing a placard that says 'Am I a man or brother?' and the *Fun* cartoon 'Really, Mr Darwin', depicting an ape-bodied bearded Darwin that holds the inscription 'That troubles our monkey again'. [no author] 'Monkeyana', *Punch* (1861), 206; [no author] 'Really, Mr Darwin', *Fun*, 16 (1872), 203. This stereotyped image is exploited in our present time by creationists like Ian T. Taylor, 'From Mammal to Man', in *In the Minds of Men: Darwin and the New World Order*, 3rd edn (Toronto: TFE Publishing, 2003), pp. 204-33, and commercial companies such as the sandwich company 'Darwin's Deli', depicting the transformation of a monkey into a delivery man. See 'Darwin's Deli: The Natural Selection' <<http://www.darwinsdeli.co.uk>> [accessed 24 November 2009].

<sup>86</sup> Jules Combarieu, *Histoire de la musique: Des origines à la mort de Beethoven*, 3 vols (Paris: Armand Colin, 1913-19), I, 1-58. Combarieu first proposed these ideas in *La musique et la magie: Étude sur les origines populaires de l'art musical, son influence et sa fonction dans les sociétés* (Paris: Picard, 1909). In his previous book, *La musique: Ses lois, son évolution* (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, 1907), Combarieu referred to Darwin's work substantially.

However, Carpentier points out that neither Sachs nor Combarieu accounts for the initial moment when man first expressed his emotions through singing. As Spencer did earlier, Carpentier links the origin of music to enhanced language:

[...] el nacimiento de la música coincide con el nacimiento de una civilización material. Y toda civilización material, por rudimentaria que sea, se acompaña de un enriquecimiento del lenguaje (p. 4).

[...] the rise of music coincides with the rise of material civilisation. And every material civilisation, however rudimentary it may be, entails an enrichment of language.

Drawing on an article by the French psychoanalysts René Allendy and René Laforgue that examines the universality of poetic comparisons, the absence of abstraction in primeval thought and the symbolic nature of language, Carpentier discusses the role of onomatopoeia and natural rhythms in human emotional expressions (pp. 5-7).<sup>87</sup> As Wallaschek did earlier, Carpentier affirms that chant originated in rhythm and coincided with the emergence of speech:

[...] no hubo, realmente, orden de sucesión, entre la palabra y el canto. El canto nació con la palabra. Y la palabra fue, en sus orígenes, una expresión dotada de música, ya por onomatopeya, ya por elección de sonidos simbólicamente representativos, ya por elección instintiva de sílabas dotada de calidad, peso o densidad relacionada con la inicial de las cosas evocadas (p. 7).

[...] in reality, neither speech nor song came first. Singing was born with speaking. And speech was, in its origins, an expression gifted with music, either by onomatopoeia, by the choice of symbolically representative sounds, or by an instinctual choice of syllables based on the quality, weight or density related to the initial [sounds] of the things evoked.

Carpentier goes on to discuss a secondary stage of primeval music, in which repetition has a key role. As many nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century thinkers do, he views primeval peoples as child-like, at the evolutionary stage of childhood in comparison with Western civilisation:

Para imponer un concepto a un individuo de inteligencia poco desarrollada, hay que repetirlo varias veces. Esto lo vemos aplicado a la educación de los niños. [...] Cuando un hombre primitivo quiere imponer una idea a sus semejantes, recurre a la repetición de esa idea, hasta saturar con ella la memoria de sus oyentes (p. 8).

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<sup>87</sup> This publication, whose title is not mentioned by Carpentier, is likely to be René Laforgue and René Allendy, *La psychanalyse et les névroses* (Paris: Payot, 1924). Both men were founding members of the Société Psychanalytique de Paris.

In order to impose a concept to an individual of little-developed intelligence, it is necessary to repeat it several times. We see this applied to children's education. [...] When a primitive man wants to impose an idea to his fellow men, he resorts to the repetition of that idea, until he saturates the memory of his audience with it.

To the concept of repetition, Carpentier adds the idea that primeval chant has a mystical nature:

Y al gritar el nombre de una divinidad, para invocar su poderío o aplacar su cólera, repitió el grito hasta estimar que había logrado su objeto. [...] Cuando ciertas palabras se repitieron con un ritmo determinado, surgió el canto. El canto, no ya onomatopéyico, sino lírico y expresivo. El canto, tal y como podemos observarlo hoy, en su forma más primitiva, en el folklore de los indios patagones y de ciertas tribus muy atrasadas de Australia (p. 8).

And by shouting the name of the divinity to invoke its power or placate its rage, he repeated the cry until he felt he had achieved his purpose. [...] When certain words were repeated with a certain rhythm, singing was born. Singing, not onomatopoeic but lyric and expressive. Singing, exactly as we can observe it nowadays, in its most primitive form, in the folk tradition of the Patagonian natives and of certain very underdeveloped tribes from Australia.

Carpentier seems to combine Combarieu's idea of the religious and magical essence of primeval chant with Rousseau's fundamental notion that language began with the instinctual need to communicate feelings and thoughts.<sup>88</sup> However, Carpentier does not share Rousseau's conception that music originated in primeval man's imitation of animal sounds. Montoya Campuzano shows that the protagonist of *Los pasos perdidos* does not believe prehistoric musical expression was simple imitation of natural sounds, adding that 'En el centro de esta burla, evidentemente, están las suposiciones de Rousseau y sus continuadores' [at the heart of this mockery are, evidently, the assumptions of Rousseau and his followers].<sup>89</sup>

In his mention of Patagonia, Carpentier is likely to be thinking of the natives of Tierra del Fuego, considered by several nineteenth-century thinkers to be among the

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<sup>88</sup> Rousseau, 'Essay on the Origin of Languages', pp. 289-90.

<sup>89</sup> Montoya Campuzano, '*Los pasos perdidos* y las teorías sobre el origen de la música', p. 61.

most 'primitive' human beings.<sup>90</sup> Darwin describes his impression on first encountering the people of Tierra del Fuego during the voyage of the HMS *Beagle* (1831-36):

It was without exception the most curious and interesting spectacle I ever beheld: I could not have believed how wide was the difference between savage and civilized man: it is greater than between a wild and domesticated animal, inasmuch as in man there is a greater power of improvement.<sup>91</sup>

Darwin recorded the natives' efforts to sing along with the British sailors:

They were quiet & inoffensive & soon joined the seamen round a blazing fire; although naked they streamed with perspiration at sitting so near to a fire which we found only comfortable. – They attempted to join Chorus with the songs; but the way in which they were always behind hand was quite laughable.<sup>92</sup>

Wallaschek also comments on the Fuegians' willingness to imitate explorers, after the observations made by Charles Wilkes during his 1838-42 expedition:

[...] the natives of Nassay Bay were excellent mimics both in voice and gesture, and they imitated every English word with great correctness of pronunciation. Their imitation of other sounds was really astounding. One of them ascended and descended

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<sup>90</sup> The English archaeologist Sir John Lubbock, who coined the terms Palaeolithic and Neolithic, reflects on this issue:

Travellers and naturalists have varied a good deal in opinion as to the race of savages which is entitled to the unenviable reputation of being the lowest in the scale of civilisation. Cook, Darwin, FitzRoy, and Wallis were decidedly in favor, if I may so say, of the Fuegian; Burchell maintained that the Bushmen are the lowest; D'Urville voted for the Australians and Tasmanians; Dampier thought the Australians "the miserablest people in the world;" Forster said that the people of Mallicollo "bordered the nearest upon the tribe of monkeys;" Owen inclines to the Andamaners; others have supported the North American Root-diggers; and one French writer even insinuates that monkeys are more human than Laplanders.

Sir John Lubbock, *Pre-historic Times: As Illustrated by Ancient Remains, and the Manners and Customs of Modern Savages* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1865), pp. 445-46.

<sup>91</sup> Charles Darwin, *Voyage of the Beagle*, ed. by Janet Browne and Michael Neve (London: Penguin Books, 1989 [1839]), p. 172. Darwin's perceptions of the natives of Tierra del Fuego corroborate a hierarchical concept of cultures. There were four distinct nomad groups: the Yahgan (also called Yamana), the Kawesqar (or Alakaluf), the Selk'nam (or Onas) and the Manek'enk (or Haush). Darwin and other thinkers referred to all of these as the Fuegians. The anthropologist Anne Chapman, who researched the groups of Tierra del Fuego for four decades, demonstrates that Darwin misunderstood several aspects of their culture, language, customs and religion. Chapman is highly critical of Darwin's devastating pictures and derogative remarks about them in the *Voyage of the Beagle* and *The Descent of Man* – what she terms 'Darwin's "meditations"'. Chapman defies: 'His comparison of them with the heroic little monkey and the courageous baboon, should not surprise the reader'. Anne Chapman, *Darwin in Tierra del Fuego* (Buenos Aires: Imago Mundi, 2006), p. 129. See my journalistic article on Darwin's complex relation with the peoples of Tierra del Fuego, 'Darwin y los hijos del Fuego', *BBC Mundo* (2009)

<[http://www.bbc.co.uk/mundo/ciencia\\_tecnologia/2009/11/091120\\_1700\\_darwin\\_fueguistas\\_wbm.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/mundo/ciencia_tecnologia/2009/11/091120_1700_darwin_fueguistas_wbm.shtml)> [accessed 24 November 2009].

<sup>92</sup> Entry written on 22 January 1833. Richard Darwin Keynes, ed., *Charles Darwin's Beagle Diary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 135.

the octave perfectly, following the sounds of a violin. Later they found that he could sing the common chord and the chromatic scale with scarcely an error.<sup>93</sup>

Wallaschek asserts that the Fuegians' own music is 'genuinely primitive', adding that 'They all have musical voices, speak in the note G sharp, ending with the semitone A when asking for presents, and were continually singing (p. 57).'

Apart from the accounts of the natives of Tierra del Fuego by Darwin and Wallaschek, Carpentier may have also come across von Hornbostel's 1936 article 'Fuegian Songs' (to my knowledge, the first monograph on the music of this people), based on recordings made by Charles Wellington Furlong (1907-08), and Martin Gusinde and Wilhelm Koppers (1922-23). When comparing 'the uniformity of the Indian musical style extending over the whole area from Magellan Straits to the Arctic sea and from the east shore of Greenland to the Jenissei' with the songs of the Yahgan and Alakaluf of Tierra del Fuego, von Hornbostel proposes

[...] to distinguish the latter tribes culturally, if not somatically, as belonging to a separate pre-Indian group. These people then would have been literally the forerunners of the real Indians' immigration into the American continent. Here they were not only driven to the remotest borders, or places difficult of access, but in the course of time naturally have been subject to influence from their less primitive neighbors.<sup>94</sup>

As von Hornbostel does, Carpentier assumes uniformity in primeval culture. The presence of present-day 'Palaeolithic' human beings in *Los pasos perdidos* echoes the suggestion that there exist human beings *even* more 'primitive' than 'the real Indians' (who are 'primitive' themselves). Von Hornbostel emphasises the importance of his study: 'Considering the special interest of the Fuegians as preserving one of the most primitive culture types and, moreover, the frightful speed of their disappearance, the value of the phonographic documents collected in the eleventh hour cannot easily be

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<sup>93</sup> Wallaschek, *Primitive Music*, p. 57. Wallaschek assumes the diatonic system as normative since the Stone Age. He draws on Hermann von Helmholtz's theory to assert that 'All the other systematic attempts at a scale [different to the diatonic one] either made a successful development of music impossible, or they degraded it from its rank as an art to a mere intellectual trifle (p. 153).'

<sup>94</sup> Erich M. von Hornbostel, 'Fuegian Songs', *American Anthropologist*, 38 (1936), 357-67 (pp. 364-65). See also Erich M. von Hornbostel, 'The Music of the Fuegians', *Ethnos*, 13 (1948), 62-102.

overrated.<sup>95</sup> The natives of Tierra del Fuego were almost extinct by the time of the writing of 'Los orígenes de la música' and the publication of *Los pasos perdidos*, which raises a question about the currency of Carpentier's data.<sup>96</sup>

Carpentier asserts that primeval man instinctively recognised the influence of repetition of formulas upon the nervous system:

Producir el éxtasis, la posesión del sujeto por una fuerza desconocida, comenzó a ser el objeto principal de los ritos primitivos. Por ello, por extensión, se atribuyeron virtudes curativas al canto ('Los orígenes de la música', p. 9).

To produce ecstasy, the possession of the subject by an unknown force, became the main aim of primitive rites. That is why, by extension, curative virtues were attributed to singing.

As an example of the psychophysical effect produced by the obsessive repetition of a rhythm in primeval music, Carpentier later mentions the ritual of 'bajar el santo' (to bring down the saint) (p. 15). This ceremony is still practised by Cubans belonging to modern Western society.<sup>97</sup> He uses Stravinsky's assertion that 'Contrast is an element of variety, but it divides our attention. Similarity is born of a striving for unity' to explain the monotonous character of primeval music (p. 9).<sup>98</sup> For Carpentier, Western music inherited primeval man's method of achieving unity through the repetition of patterns, which accounts for the origin of Western musical forms:

En esto, los hombres primitivos hallaron instintivamente un principio primordial de la construcción sonora, del que nadie ha logrado liberarse hasta ahora (p. 10).

In this, primitive man instinctively found an essential principle of musical construction, which nobody has been able to get rid of so far.

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<sup>95</sup> von Hornbostel, 'Fuegian Songs', p. 357.

<sup>96</sup> For information on the extinction of the natives of Tierra del Fuego, see Colin McEwan, Luis A. Borrero, and Alfredo Prieto, eds., *Patagonia: Natural History, Prehistory and Ethnography at the Uttermost End of the Earth* (London: British Museum Press, 1997).

<sup>97</sup> *Bajar el santo* is a ritual in Santería (a Cuban syncretic religious tradition that merges the Yoruba religion of West Africa with Catholicism) in which an initiated devotee is possessed by an 'Orisha' (a spirit or deity). For a guide to the various traditions and branches of Afro-Cuban religions, see Miguel Barnet, *Afro-Cuban Religions*, trans. by Christine Renata Ayorinde (Princeton: Markus Wiener; Kingston: Ian Randle, 2001). In 'Los orígenes de la música' and also in the novel *¡Ecue Yamba-Ó!*, Carpentier also mentions a ritual which he calls 'Oleli'. I have not been able to find information about this ceremony. It might be that this ritual is known to scholars by a different name.

<sup>98</sup> This quotation comes from Stravinsky, *Poetics of Music, in the Form of Six Lessons*, p. 32.

Although Wallaschek seems to imply a link between primeval music and form through rhythm, no other thinkers before Carpentier seem to have developed this notion.<sup>99</sup> He begins his discussion of early musical instruments by claiming that

Todos los musicólogos están de acuerdo en que el primer instrumento musical utilizado por el hombre fueron sus propias manos. Con sus manos, se habituó a ritmar sus cantos e invocaciones. Con sus manos, golpeadas una contra la otra, o percutiendo en su pecho, o en su vientre. Durante milenios, este fue el único instrumento musical conocido (p. 10).

All musicologists agree that the first musical instrument used by man was his own hands. With his hands, he got used to rhyming his songs and invocations. With his hands, clapping against each other or hitting his chest or belly. For millennia, this was the only known musical instrument.

Presumably, this is an extrapolation from Sachs's 1940 *History of Musical Instruments*, where it is suggested that instruments originated in primeval man's body movements, including dancing, stamping, clapping and slapping.<sup>100</sup> Sachs does not maintain that hands were the only musical artefacts for thousands of years, nor does he claim that *all* scholars agree with this idea. It seems doubtful that the mere clapping of rhythms would be a satisfying activity for such a long period, or that this activity was directly responsible for the development of mystical invocations.<sup>101</sup>

Carpentier agrees with Sachs's idea that the first musical instruments formed part of man's ritual attire. He seems to be hinting at Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, the composition that was to feature so significantly in his novel *La consagración de la primavera*, when he asserts that

La danza primitiva entraña siempre un rito, debido a su origen mágico y religioso. Esta ley se observa en las danzas guerreras, destinadas a enardecer los hombres que van a entregarse al combate; se observa en las danzas que acompañan las ceremonias de

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<sup>99</sup> There are, however, some subsequent studies that share the idea that repetition in 'prehistoric' music evolved into Western forms, for instance Carlos Chávez, *Musical Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961), pp. 35-54.

<sup>100</sup> Curt Sachs, *The History of Musical Instruments* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1940), pp. 25-26.

<sup>101</sup> In recent years, several archaeological studies that relate manual gesture with vocal specialisation in prehistoric man have been published. See literature review in Iain Morley, 'The Evolutionary Origins and Archaeology of Music: Or an Investigation into the Prehistory of Human Musical Capacities and Behaviours, Using Archaeological, Anthropological, Cognitive and Behavioural Evidence' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Cambridge University, 2003), pp. 12-31, 125-83.



invocación de lluvias, de entrada a la pubertad de las doncellas de la tribu, de acción de gracia a las fuerzas fecundantes de la naturaleza (p. 11).

Primitive dance always implies a rite, due to its origin in magic and religion. This rule is seen in warlike dances, aimed to arouse men who go to combat; it is observed in dances accompanying ceremonies of invocation of rain, of tribal maidens beginning their puberty, of thanksgiving to fertility forces of nature.

Carpentier describes the 1914 classification of instruments by von Hornbostel and Sachs, illustrating each group with present-day instruments from Cuba (pp. 4-5, 11-12). He points out that Sachs ignores two 'prehistoric' Cuban instruments that are still in use, the *quijada* and the *tumbandera*.<sup>102</sup> He urges researchers to take his country into consideration:

Cuba es la tierra de elección para este tipo de investigaciones, ya que la *quijada*, la *tumbandera*, la *marímbula*, las *claves*, la *botija*, constituyen casos rarísimos de supervivencia de los primeros instrumentos conocidos por el hombre. [...] Tenemos, pues, en Cuba, instrumentos de origen paleolítico y neolítico, del más alto interés. Instrumentos que tienen veinticinco mil años de historia! (pp. 13-14)

Cuba is the land of choice for this type of research, since the *quijada*, the *tumbandera*, the *marímbula*, the *claves*, the *botija*, represent very rare survival cases of the earliest instruments known to man. [...] We have, thus, in Cuba, instruments of Palaeolithic and Neolithic origin, of the greatest interest. Instruments which have twenty-five thousand years of history!

In his nationalistic plea to enlarge the scope of ethnomusicological research, Carpentier exposes a bias that still exists in archaeological research into musical instruments, as researchers have focused on Europe and neglected the rest of the world, as Ian Cross and Iain Morley note.<sup>103</sup> Carpentier goes on to examine the order of appearance and evolution of prehistoric musical instruments. He suggests that percussion instruments were the first to appear, as melodic instruments needed a more evolved material civilisation: 'Por ello, las músicas primitivas evolucionaron principalmente en el sentido rítmico, relegando la melodía al segundo plano (p. 14)' [For that reason, primitive

<sup>102</sup> The *tumbandera* must not be mistaken for the *tumbadora*, a Cuban drum used in *rumba* music. Ortiz also points out that Sachs ignores this instrument. Fernando Ortiz, *Los instrumentos de la música afrocubana*, 5 vols (Havana: Dirección de Cultura del Ministerio de Educación, 1952-55), III (1952), 183-202.

<sup>103</sup> Cross and Morley, 'The Evolution of Music: Theories, Definitions and the Nature of the Evidence', p. 74.

music evolved mainly in the rhythmic sense, relegating melody to second place]. It should be noted that in the 1940s, there was very scarce archaeological evidence of musical instruments. The latest archaeological findings to date are bone and ivory flutes from the early Aurignacian period, which demonstrate the presence of a well-established musical tradition over 35,000 years old.<sup>104</sup> However, musical instruments are not the most likely artefacts to survive from early material cultures (presumably, flutes do not last as long as flint axe heads). As Cross and Morley point out, the superior preservation of bone over other organic materials may bias the archaeological record.<sup>105</sup>

According to Carpentier, a fact of spiritual nature made instruments develop differently:<sup>106</sup>

[...] el hombre primitivo – aceptando la terminología de Spengler –, es hombre fáustico por esencia. Una civilización de tipo apolíneo, como la griega, tenía, por fuerza, que evolucionar hacia la melodía, elemento definido y claro, lineal y equilibrado, propiciador de orden y conocimiento. Por el trujamán del espíritu griego, nos llega toda nuestra música occidental, que alcanza, en la clara polifonía renacentista, la suprema expresión de lo apolíneo. Pueblos de místicos y magos, de profetas y hechiceros, de invocadores y augurios, tenían que ser llevados, forzosamente, por la índole fáustica de su espíritu, hacia el mundo, infinitamente misterioso, del ritmo ('Los orígenes de la música', pp. 14-15).

[...] primitive man is – to adopt Spengler's terminology – Faustian in essence. An Apollonian-type civilisation, like the Greek, had perforce to evolve towards melody, a definite and clear element, linear and balanced, propitiator of order and knowledge. The spirit of the Greeks has acted as mediator, bringing us the whole of our Western music, reaching in the clear polyphony of the Renaissance the supreme expression of the Apollonian. The world of mystics and magicians, of prophets and shamans, of conjurors and omens, could only be carried, because of the Faustian nature of their spirit, towards the world, infinitely mysterious, by mere rhythm.

Carpentier's remarks are confusing. He seems to contrast Western (melodic) music with Faustian (rhythmic) music. Yet Spengler, as was discussed in Chapter One, views

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<sup>104</sup> Nicholas J. Conard, Maria Malina, and Susanne C. Münzel, 'New Flutes Document the Earliest Musical Tradition in Southwestern Germany', *Nature*, 460 (2009), 737-40.

<sup>105</sup> Cross and Morley, 'The Evolution of Music: Theories, Definitions and the Nature of the Evidence', p. 74.

<sup>106</sup> Here, Carpentier may be filling a gap left by Wallaschek, who proposed but did not develop an examination of the qualities of human souls in relation to the origins of music. *Primitive Music*, pp. 249-50.

eighteenth-century polyphonic works as the peak of Western civilisation, which he associates with the Faustian soul.

Carpentier goes on to discuss percussion instruments from Africa and Asia, and compares them with Western symphonic ensembles, which contain only ‘pobrísimos elementos, de una torpeza y mal sonido (p. 16)’ [very poor examples, of such awkwardness and bad sound]. He mentions his ethnological work in Haiti, which ‘me reveló un mundo de ritmos nuevos (p. 16)’ [revealed to me a world of new rhythms]. He draws attention to the use of ‘primitive’ rhythmical principles by contemporary Western composers ‘durante más de diez años (p. 18)’ [for more than ten years].<sup>107</sup> Like many comparative musicologists, Carpentier sees great potential in this transference, noting that Poulenc, Milhaud and Villa-Lobos ‘han vuelto de sus incursiones al África, a las selvas del Amazonas, a los cabarets de Harlem, con las manos llenas (p. 18)’ [have returned from their trips to Africa, to the Amazon rainforests, to Harlem cabarets, full of ideas].<sup>108</sup>

Carpentier also attributes some of the qualities he sees in primeval indigenous music to popular music falling outside the mainstream European / North American culture (*world music*, in contemporary terms), particularly to Cuban music for export. Crucially, he argues that folk music validates itself when it generates musical forms comparable with those of the European tradition. For instance, in his article ‘El alma de la rumba en el *Plantation*’ (1932), Carpentier links primeval invocation with Cuban music played in Parisian cabarets:

¿Qué fantasma sutil, qué imagen terrible o encantadora surgirá al conjuro de la invocación? Porque la música cubana es una perenne invocación. [...] Todas las esencias de nuestras danzas [populares cubanas] se ven mezcladas en esa *summa* de ritmos, plena de gravedad y de esa dignidad altiva que se desprende de la práctica de un

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<sup>107</sup> This statement reads oddly, considering that Carpentier wrote ‘Los orígenes de la música’ at least thirty years after Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring*, which he mentions shortly afterwards.

<sup>108</sup> After Stravinsky’s *Rite*, the use of ‘the primitive’ within avant-garde music has continued with pieces like Edgard Varèse’s *Ecuatorial* (1934), John Cage’s *Bacchanale* (1940) and Harrison Birtwistle’s *Silbury Air* (1976-77).

rito. Danza del instinto, de la pulsación esencial; danza de lo elemental, perdurable por esa virtud misma.<sup>109</sup>

What a subtle ghost, what a terrible or charming image will appear after the spell of the invocation? Because Cuban music is a perennial invocation. [...] All the essentials of our [Cuban popular] dances are seen mixed in that *summa* of rhythms, full of gravity and of that proud dignity which follows from the practice of a rite. Dance of instinct, of essential pulse; dance of the elementary, lasting due to that same virtue.

In his article 'La rue Fontaine: calle cubana' (1932), he argues:

El folklore sólo sabe defenderse cuando ha logrado crear, formar moldes, géneros bien definidos. Un *son* es una *forma* musical, con tanta justificación, con tanta razón de existir, como una *sonata* o una *sinfonía*.<sup>110</sup>

Folklore only knows how to defend itself when it has been able to create, to form well-defined moulds. A *son* [a popular Cuban genre] is a musical *form*, with so much justification, with so much reason to exist, as a *sonata* or a *symphony*.

The valorisation of the primeval, particularly black culture, for its anthropological significance and vital potential for contemporary art was also commonplace in the avant-garde circles Carpentier frequented in Cuba and France.<sup>111</sup>

Carpentier highlights Milhaud's innovations in his *Oresteia* (*Agamemnon*, 1913; *Les choéphores*, 1915-16, *Les euménides*, 1917-23), which employ 'un principio tan antiguo como el hombre' [a principle as old as man] and contain, 'como en las invocaciones primeras – una simple declaración rítmica, hablada, gritada, y vociferada' ('Los orígenes de la música, p. 18') [as in early invocations – simply rhythmic speech, shouts and yells]. Milhaud's expression of primeval invocation, which he later employed in his *Christophe Colomb* (1928) and *Incantations* (1939, written in

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<sup>109</sup> Alejo Carpentier, 'El alma de la rumba en el *Plantation*', in *Crónicas I*, Obras Completas Series, 16 vols (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1983-94), VIII (1985), 305-10 (pp. 307-08).

<sup>110</sup> Alejo Carpentier, 'La rue Fontaine: calle cubana', in *Crónicas I*, Obras Completas Series, 16 vols (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1983-94), VIII (1985), 295-99 (p. 299).

<sup>111</sup> Birkenmaier explains that during his years in Paris, Carpentier was writing for both white Cubans belonging to the Afro-Cuban movement, and for a French audience swept in a *Négrophilie* craze. See Birkenmaier, *Alejo Carpentier y la cultura del surrealismo en América Latina*, pp. 25-27. See also Carole Sweeney, *From Fetish to Subject: Race, Modernism, and Primitivism, 1919-1935* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), pp. 4-8.

collaboration with Carpentier), achieved ‘esplendorosa eficiencia musical (p. 18)’ [splendid musical effectiveness].<sup>112</sup>

The above brings to mind the attempts by the protagonist of *Los pasos perdidos* to replicate primeval invocation in his new composition. John Martin and Kathleen McNerney suggest that Carpentier used André Jolivet’s music as the model for the protagonist’s planned piece. Caroline Rae points to Edgard Varèse. Leonardo Acosta indicates that the inspiration came from Hilario González and Tony de Blois Carreño.<sup>113</sup> While I do not exclude the likely influence of the works of these composers, Carpentier’s praise of Milhaud and his mention of their collaboration in *Incantations* seem telling, if we assume that ‘Los orígenes de la música’ is the pre-text of *Los pasos perdidos* and that the latter contains substantial autobiographical references. Moreover, in ‘Temas de la lira y el bongó’ (1929), Carpentier refers to a long conversation he held with Milhaud, in which they discussed ‘los instrumentos de percusión indios y afroamericanos cuyas posibilidades pudieran ser útiles a la orquesta moderna’ [indigenous and Afro-(Latin) American percussion instruments whose possibilities could be useful to the modern orchestra].<sup>114</sup> He tells Milhaud that if he went to Cuba, he would see that ‘en nuestras minas existen gruesos diamantes sonoros, capaces de *épatar* completamente a hombres como Stravinski, como Honegger, o como vos mismo (p. 432)’ [in our mines there are thick sonic diamonds, able to make men like Stravinsky, Honegger or you completely overwhelmed].

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<sup>112</sup> For a discussion of Carpentier’s articles on Milhaud and a description of their piece *Incantations*, see Rae, ‘In Havana and Paris: the Musical Activities of Alejo Carpentier’, pp. 388-89.

<sup>113</sup> John Martin and Kathleen McNerney, ‘Carpentier and Jolivet: Magic Music in *Los pasos perdidos*’, *Hispanic Review*, 52 (1984), 491-98 (p. 498); Rae, ‘In Havana and Paris: the Musical Activities of Alejo Carpentier’, p. 390; Leonardo Acosta, ‘Literary Material and Lived Experience in *Los pasos perdidos*’, *A Contracorriente: A Journal of Social History and Literature in Latin America*, 5 (2008), 127-33 <[http://www.ncsu.edu/project/accontracorriente/spring\\_08/Acosta%20sobre%20Carpentier.pdf](http://www.ncsu.edu/project/accontracorriente/spring_08/Acosta%20sobre%20Carpentier.pdf)> [accessed 14 November 2010]. Montoya Campuzano points to André Schaeffner, though he was not a composer. Montoya Campuzano, ‘*Los pasos perdidos* y las teorías sobre el origen de la música’, p. 60.

<sup>114</sup> Alejo Carpentier, ‘Temas de la lira y el bongó’, in *Ese músico que llevo dentro 2*, Obras Completas Series, 16 vols (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1983-94), XI (1987), 425-32 (p. 427). The place and date of this conversation are not mentioned.

‘Los orígenes de la música’ concludes with a strong plea for the preservation and promotion of so-called primitive music:

La supervivencia de una [sic] música primitiva – al estado puro, evolucionada, degenerada o sincréticamente modificada – en ciertas regiones de nuestro globo, es herencia del pasado que debemos conservar a toda costa. No sólo, porque la música primitiva encierra reales y verdaderas bellezas de ritmo y melodía, sino porque en ella se encuentra la clave de una serie de problemas etnológicos, semánticos y psicológicos, destinados a ser, por muchos siglos aún, objetos de investigaciones por parte de la cultura occidental! (p. 19)

The survival of primitive music – in unadulterated state, evolved, degenerated or modified by syncretism – in certain regions of the world, is an inheritance of the past which we should preserve at any price. Not just because primitive music contains true and real beauties of rhythm and melody, but because in it one finds the key for a series of ethnological, semantic and psychological problems, which are bound to be, for many centuries yet, research topics of Western culture!

Carpentier’s final statement about the various states in which ‘primitive’ music can be found epitomises his evolutionary views. He took his own challenge about using this music as a means to investigate ‘ethnological, semantic and psychological problems’ in his novel *Los pasos perdidos*, which I shall discuss next.

### III. Reading music backwards:

#### the quest for primeval music in *Los pasos perdidos*

*Los pasos perdidos* is the second novel of Carpentier's 'American' cycle. It was written after the author's trip to the area of the Orinoco River Basin in Venezuela in the mid-1940s. In this novel, he projects his interest in the origins of music, prehistoric musical instruments, ethnomusicological research and contemporary music, developing ideas he first elaborated in his unpublished text 'Los orígenes de la música y la música primitiva'.

The unnamed narrator-protagonist of the novel is a frustrated composer working for a publicity agency in New York. He bumps into the Curator of the University's Museum of Organology, who tries to persuade him to travel into the South American jungle to collect some rare indigenous instruments. Typical of comparatist enterprises, his job involves gathering specimens in order to fill a key gap in the knowledge of non-Western music. The protagonist thinks of von Hornbostel, Sachs and Schaeffner as he impassively watches his former mentor arrange his transcendental mission over the phone:

Cada razón expuesta debía hacerme crecer en la imaginación del interlocutor invisible [el Rector de la Universidad], dándome la estatura de un von Horbostel [Hornbostel] joven. Y con miedo advertí que se confiaba en mí, firmemente, para traer, entre otros idiófonos singulares, un injerto de tambor y bastón de ritmo que Schaeffner y Curt Sachs ignoraban, y la famosa jarra con dos embocaduras de caña, usada por ciertos indios en sus ceremonias funerarias, que el Padre Servando de Castillejos hubiera descrito, en 1561, en su tratado *De barbarorum Novi Mundi moribus*, y no figuraba en ninguna colección organográfica (p. 26).

Each reason that he adduced must have made me grow in the imagination of his invisible interlocutor [the Principal of the University], conferring on me the stature of a young Von Horbostel [von Hornbostel]. With growing dismay, I discovered that I was being entrusted with the task of bringing back, among other idiophones, a cross between a drum and a rhythm-stick which Schaeffner and Curt Sachs knew nothing of, and the famous jar with two openings fitted with reeds which had been employed by certain Indians in funeral rites that Father Servando de Castillejos had described in 1651 in his treatise *De barbarorum Novi Mundi moribus*. This was not listed in any organographic collection (p. 26).

The 'cross between a drum and a rhythm-stick' seems to be the same as the *tumbandera*, discussed in 'Los orígenes de la música' as one of the few prehistoric musical instruments that still exists, of which Sachs is not aware (pp. 13-14). The 'jar with two openings', the other rare instrument the protagonist is required to find, is called *botija* later in the novel (pp. 199, 200). The *botija* is mentioned in 'Los orígenes de la música' too (pp. 12-13).<sup>115</sup>

Before the protagonist began working in commercial industry, he had devoted himself to studying and classifying primeval instruments. He now attempts to convince the Curator he is not apt for the mission in the jungle, alluding to his present distance from intellectual activity and ignorance of the newest methods of classification based on the morphological evolution of instruments.<sup>116</sup> These issues do not seem to be important to the Curator.

The protagonist ponders staying at home. If he did, not only would he keep thinking about his wife and work, but he would also have to face

[...] el vacío de tres semanas huera, demasiado breves para emprender algo, y que serían amargadas, mientras más corrieran las fechas, por el sentimiento de la posibilidad desdeñada (pp. 35-36).

[...] the three empty weeks ahead of me, too short to undertake anything, whose days would slip past embittered by the sense of lost opportunity (p. 36).

Unwillingly, he accepts the Curator's offer and gives in to the wishes of his lover Mouche, who has invited herself to join the trip which she regards as a holiday. For her, the hurdle of the instruments might easily be solved by presenting fake specimens, 'científicos, fidedignos (p. 34)' ['scientific, accurate (p. 35)'], replicas expertly

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<sup>115</sup> In his dictionary of Cuban music and instruments, Helio Orovio describes the *tumbandera* (also known as *tingotalango*) as 'A flexible twig, stuck in the ground, that when arched tenses a wire or cord tied to a vegetable (dried palm-tree leaf) or tin sheet. The sheet is fixed to the ground, covering a hole that has been dug at a certain distance from the tensing arch.' Helio Orovio, *Cuban Music From A to Z*, trans. by Ricardo Bardo Portilla and Lucy Davies (Durham, NC: Duke University Press; Bath: Tumi Music, 2004), p. 211. Montoya Campuzano notes that Carpentier also mentions the 'cross between a drum and a rhythm-stick' and the 'jar with two openings' in his article 'El mundo del tiempo detenido' (1952). Montoya Campuzano, 'Los pasos perdidos y las teorías sobre el origen de la música', p. 60.

<sup>116</sup> As mentioned in Chapter Two, here Carpentier is hinting at André Schaeffner's 1932 system of instrument classification.



produced by a friend, a master of forgery. The protagonist first rejects her proposal with repulsion, but later reflects that

[...] difícil sería que sus eruditos [de la Universidad], envejecidos entre libros, sin contacto directo con los artesanos de la selva, se percataran del engaño (p. 36).

[...] it would be hard for its scholars [the University's], gone grey among books, and without direct contact with jungle craftsmen, to discern the fraud (p. 36).

Once in the South American metropolis, it occurs to the protagonist that he might be able to buy the instruments from someone like 'un vendedor de objetos curiosos, un explorador cansado de andanzas (p. 43)' ['a seller of souvenirs, an explorer tired of roaming (p. 44)'].

As they advance into the deep jungle, the protagonist becomes more and more disenchanted with his travel companion. He tells her about his delight in experiencing a culture 'más honrada y válida, probablemente, que la que se nos había quedado *allá* (p. 123)' ['more estimable and valid, perhaps, than that which we had left behind (p. 124)']. As Mouche heatedly rejects this idea, the protagonist changes his mind about acquiring forged or fake instruments in order to fit in with her holiday plans, and makes it clear that he is indeed determined to find the real ones. The announcement is met by an insult:

Ya que mi empeño de quedar bien con el Curador y, por ende, con mi conciencia, se atravesaba en su camino, tal propósito tenía, por fuerza, que ser calificado por ella de *burgués* (p. 124).

As my determination to do the right thing by the Curator and therefore by my conscience was a stumbling-block to her plans, such an objective became *ipso facto* bourgeois (p. 125).

Fortunately for the protagonist, a rattle, a maraca, deer-horn trumpets, rattles, a conch, panpipes and a resounding jar appear five days later. Although it was the settler el Adelantado who found these instruments, the protagonist sees it as his own personal achievement:

La misión estaba cumplida. En quince días justos había alcanzado mi objeto de modo realmente laudable, y, orgulloso de ello, palpaba deleitosamente los trofeos del deber

cumplido. El rescate de la jarra sonora – pieza magnífica –, era el primer acto excepcional, memorable, que se hubiera inscrito hasta ahora en mi existencia (p. 174).

My mission was accomplished. In exactly fifteen days I had achieved what I had set out to do and, with justifiable pride, I savoured the delights of duty's reward. To have secured [the rescue of] that roaring [sounding] jar – a magnificent specimen – was the first outstanding, noteworthy act of my life to that moment (p. 174).

In his 'rescuing' act, the protagonist seems to believe he is protecting endangered specimens. Yet his action does not involve the preservation of living musical expressions or the conservation of instrument-making traditions. Instead, he is extracting the instruments from their habitat so that the Museum can expand its collection.

Later, he takes the firm decision to stay in the jungle and stop thinking about the origins of music – 'esas vanas especulaciones de tipo intelectual (p. 198)' ['these idle speculations (p. 199)'] –, something that much occupied his thoughts before becoming a commercial composer. The instruments, already viewed as 'piezas de museo, en perpetuo reclamo de fichas y vitrinas (p. 199)' ['museum pieces, mutely demanding index cards and showcase [display cases] (p. 200)'], become troublesome as they tie him to the world from which he is trying to escape. Rather than putting the instruments back in their place of origin, he thinks 'Debería sacar esos instrumentos de aquí, romperlos acaso, enterrar sus restos al pie de alguna peña (p. 199)' ['I ought to have got these instruments out of here, broken them, buried the pieces at the foot of a rock (p. 200)']. Once again, he changes his mind and decides to dispatch the instruments to the Curator.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> The appropriation and re-contextualisation of rare musical artefacts by cultural institutions is common in the real world, as Kevin Dawe explains: 'musical instruments become so entangled with museum culture and colonisation by the "host" that their meaning and exchange value are useful, and function only in relation to, the concepts that make up museum culture.' Kevin Dawe, 'People, Objects, Meaning: Recent Work on the Study and Collection of Musical Instruments', *The Galpin Society Journal*, 54 (2001), 219-32 (p. 223). In this study, Dawe views musical instruments 'as objects existing at the intersection of material, social and cultural worlds, as socially and culturally constructed, in metaphor and meaning, industry and commerce, and as active in the shaping of social and cultural life (p. 220).'

For the protagonist, the 'primitive' instruments are meaningful to his process of self-discovery. His vacillations between accepting and rejecting the mission, acquiring fake instruments and 'rescuing' the genuine ones, and destroying and dispatching them to the Curator, are all part of his search for authenticity. I shall now explore his 'idle speculations' on the origins of music.

### **'Something far beyond language, and yet still far from song'**

After the acquisition of the instruments, the protagonist continues his journey. In an indigenous community – which Carpentier in his epilogue identifies as the Shirishanas<sup>118</sup> – he has the extraordinary opportunity to observe the genesis of both speech and music during a ceremony in which a shaman tries to revive a dead man by performing a ritual chant:

[...] el Hechicero comienza a sacudir una calabaza de gravilla – único instrumento que conoce esta gente – para tratar de ahuyentar a los mandatarios de la Muerte. Hay un silencio ritual, preparador del ensalmo, que lleva a la expectación de los que esperan a su colmo. Y en la gran selva que se llena de espantos nocturnos, surge la Palabra. Una palabra que es ya más que palabra. Una palabra que imita la voz de quien dice, y también la que se atribuye al espíritu que posee el cadáver. Una sale de la garganta del ensalmador; la otra, de su vientre. Una es grave y confusa como un subterráneo hervor de lava; la otra, de timbre mediano, es colérica y destemplada. Se alternan. Se responden. Una increpa cuando la otra gime; la del vientre se hace sarcasmo cuando la que surge del gaznate parece apremiar. Hay como portamentos guturales, prolongados en aullidos; sílabas que, de pronto, se repiten mucho, llegando a crear un ritmo; hay trinos de súbito cortados por cuatro notas que son el embrión de una melodía. Pero luego es el vibrar de la lengua entre los labios, el ronquido hacia adentro, el jadeo a contratiempo sobre la maraca. Es algo situado mucho más allá del lenguaje, y que, sin embargo, está muy lejos aún del canto. Algo que ignora la vocalización, pero es ya algo más que palabra. [...] Ante la terquedad de la Muerte, que se niega a soltar su presa, la Palabra, de pronto, se ablanda y descorazona. En boca del Hechicero, del órfico ensalmador, estertora y cae, convulsivamente, el Treno – pues esto y no otra cosa es un treno –, dejándome deslumbrado por la revelación de que acabo de asistir al Nacimiento de la Música (pp. 183-84).

[...] the shaman began to shake a gourd full of pebbles – the only instrument these people know – trying to drive off the emissaries of Death. There was a ritual silence, setting the stage for the incantation, which raised the tension of the spectators to fever pitch. And in the vast jungle filling with night terrors, there arose the Word. A word that was more than word. A word that imitated the voice of the speaker, and of that

<sup>118</sup> For a study on this little-researched ethnic group, see John F. Peters, 'The Shirishana of the Yanomami: A Demographic Study', *Social Biology*, 27 (1980), 272-85.

attributed to the spirit in possession of the corpse. One came from the throat of the shaman; the other from his belly. One was deep and confused like the bubbling of underground lava; the other, medium in pitch, was harsh and wrathful. They alternated. They answered each other. The one upbraided when the other groaned; the belly voice turned sarcastic when the throat voice seemed to plead. Sounds like the guttural portamenti were heard, ending in howls; syllables repeated over and over, coming to create a kind of rhythm; there were trills suddenly interrupted by four notes that were the embryo of a melody. But then came the vibration of the tongue between the lips, the indrawn snoring, the panting contrapuntal to the rattle of the maraca. This was something far beyond language, and yet still far from song. Something that had not yet discovered vocalization, but was more than word. [...] Before the stubbornness of Death, which refused to release its prey, the Word suddenly grew faint and disheartened. In the mouth of the shaman, the spell-working orifice, the *Threne* – for that was what this was – gasped and died away convulsively, blinding me with the realization that I had just witnessed the Birth of Music (pp. 183-84).

The protagonist is transfixed by the affective power of the shaman's chant, which he sees as a staged performance. He does not share his feelings or pay attention to the reactions of the other people attending the ceremony. Against a telluric and terrifying backdrop, the shaman's ritual dramatises the key proposals of Carpentier's 'Los orígenes de la música': speech and music emerge simultaneously, repetition and onomatopoeia generate musical rhythm and primeval chant is of mystical nature. The protagonist later suggests that the alternation of two distinct intonations in the shaman's chant 'era, en sí, un embrión de Sonata (p. 213)' ['was in itself the embryo of the sonata (p. 214)'], which relates to the idea in 'Los orígenes de la música' that the repetition of primeval music patterns accounts for the origin of Western musical forms.

After the revealing experience of witnessing 'the Birth of Music', the protagonist dismisses his past theory which explained ancestral musical expression as an attempt to imitate the motions of animals, in line with the belief that man, through graphic depictions of animals, intended to gain power over their living counterparts (pp. 197, 198). Central to the protagonist's critique of previous research on primeval music (including his own) is the dismissal of contemporary people and their customs:

Veo cuán vanas son las especulaciones de quienes pretenden situarse en los albores de ciertas artes o instituciones del hombre, sin conocer, en su vida cotidiana, en sus prácticas curativas y religiosas, al hombre prehistórico, contemporáneo nuestro (p. 197).

I saw how unfounded were the speculations of those who feel that they can grasp the beginnings of certain of man's arts or institutions without knowing prehistoric man, our contemporary, in his daily life, in his healing and religious practices (p. 198).

In his suggestion to study present-day 'primitives' to understand ancestral artistic expressions, the protagonist is not proposing new methods of study but drawing on a nineteenth-century notion that was already falling into disuse at the time of the publication of the novel. Sachs, for instance, alluded to 'the current fallacy of superimposing modern reasoning upon early man' in his *History of Musical Instruments* (1940).<sup>119</sup>

As Carpentier does in 'Los orígenes de la música', the protagonist dismisses the idea that primeval man attempted to imitate birds in an aesthetic expression:

Pienso en las tonterías dichas por quienes llegaron a sostener que el hombre prehistórico halló la música en el afán de imitar la belleza del gorjeo de los pájaros – como si el trino del ave tuviese un sentido musical-estético para quien lo oye constantemente en la selva (p. 198).

I thought of all the nonsense uttered by those who take the position that prehistoric man discovered music in his desire to imitate the beauty of bird-warblings – as though the song of a bird had any musical-aesthetic value for those who hear it constantly (p. 199).

He emphasises he *has seen* the genesis of music in its authentic setting, unlike other researchers who discussed primeval music

[...] a través de los libros, de los tratados de psicología, construyendo hipótesis arriesgadas acerca de la pervivencia, en la tragedia antigua, de prácticas derivadas de una hechicería ya remota (p. 197).

[...] through books, through studies in psychology, building dangerous hypotheses on the survival, in the classical tragedy, of practices deriving from a sorcery already remote (pp. 198-99).

The protagonist's plea for hands-on experience in ethnomusicological research is symptomatic of the methodological shifts that occurred in the 1950s. As discussed in Chapter Two, these crucial changes parallel some of the reformulations propelled by Claude Lévi-Strauss.

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<sup>119</sup> Sachs, *The History of Musical Instruments*, p. 25.

Like several comparative musicologists and Carpentier in 'Los orígenes de la música', the protagonist highlights the genuine inspirational potential of the primeval for contemporary music.<sup>120</sup> When blissfully contemplating the 'rescued' primeval instruments, he feels as though 'algo, dentro de mí, había madurado enormemente, manifestándose bajo la forma singular de un gran contrapunto de Palestrina (p. 174)' ['something within me had ripened [matured], taking the strange form of one of Palestrina's great counterpoints [contrapuntal masterpieces] (p. 174)']. This revelation is followed by the understanding of the true essence of music among people with whom 'ni siquiera podríamos hallarnos en la coincidencia de una gesticulación (p. 181)' ['we could not even meet in the coincidence of a gesture (p. 181)']. Although he thinks he has nothing in common with these 'primitives', he chooses to model his long-dreamt cantata upon the shaman's chant, using compositional techniques and orchestral instruments of the European tradition. He conceptualises his piece as follows:

[...] pensaba yo lograr una coexistencia de la escritura polifónica y la de tipo armónico, concertadas, machihembradas, según las leyes más auténticas de la música, dentro de una oda vocal y sinfónica, en constante aumento de intensidad expresiva, cuya concepción general era, por lo pronto, bastante sensata. La sencillez del enunciado prepararía al oyente para la percepción de una simultaneidad de planos [...]. En cuanto a la armonía, pensaba hallar un elemento de unidad en el uso habilidoso de los modos eclesiásticos, cuyos recursos inexplorados empezaban a ser aprovechados, desde hacía muy pocos años, por algunos de los músicos más inteligentes del momento (pp. 212-13).

[...] I hoped to arrive at a combination of polyphonic and harmonic writing, concerted, mortised, in keeping with the most valid laws of music, within the framework of a vocal, symphonic ode, gradually rising in intensity of expression. The general concept, at any rate, was sensible enough. The simplicity of the recitative would prepare the listener to perceive the simultaneous planes [...]. As for the harmony, I hoped to find an element of unity in the skilful use of the ecclesiastical modes, whose untouched resources were beginning to be utilized by some of the most intelligent of contemporary musicians (pp. 213-14).

<sup>120</sup> Here, the protagonist seems to exclude atonal music, about which he does not seem to have positive views. Before advancing into the deep jungle, he notices with much annoyance that Latin American composers have adopted dodecaphonic techniques (pp. 74-75, 75). He later refers to the Second Viennese School's 'logros exasperados, paroxísticos (p. 211)' ['exasperated, convulsive achievements (p. 212)']. As mentioned in Chapter Two, many musicologists investigating music's origins at the turn of the twentieth century reacted very negatively to the advent of atonality, particularly to Schoenberg's music. Carpentier, however, holds positive opinions about Schoenberg's music in his various articles about him. For instance, in 'La muerte de un gran compositor', Carpentier situates Schoenberg 'en el plano de los más grandes compositores de todos los tiempos' [on the level of the greatest composers of all times] Alejo Carpentier, 'La muerte de un gran compositor' (1957), in *Ese músico que llevo dentro I*, Obras Completas Series, 16 vols (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1983-94), X (1987), 116-19 (p. 117).

The protagonist's piece sounds not unlike Milhaud's polymodal music, which Carpentier admired for its 'solidez [que] estaba asegurada ante todo por la severa estructura diatónica de cada parte separada' [strength which was, above all, secured by the strict diatonic structure of each part separately].<sup>121</sup> As mentioned in the previous chapter, Carpentier's praise in 'Los orígenes de la música' of Milhaud's technique of using primeval invocation for dramatic works, and their artistic collaboration in *Incantations* may suggest that the protagonist of *Los pasos perdidos* is a conscious amalgam of the author and Milhaud.

### The question of time

The protagonist evokes music when reflecting on the flowing of time and his own internal changes. Early during his trip, he realises with delight he is perceiving time differently:

Observo ahora que yo, maniático medidor del tiempo, atento al metrónomo por vocación y al cronógrafo por oficio, he dejado, desde hace días, de pensar en la hora, relacionando la altura del sol con el apetito o el sueño (p. 111).

I noticed that I, to whom the measuring of time was a mania, shackled to the metronome by vocation and to the clock by profession, had stopped thinking of the hour, gauging the height of the sun by hunger or sleep (p. 112).

Time elapses, stretches and regresses to a prehistoric stage, as he finds himself

[...] atónito ante todo lo que cabe en ciertos tiempos de esta sinfonía que estamos leyendo al revés, de derecha a izquierda, contra la clave de *sol*, retrocediendo hacia los compases del Génesis. Porque, al atardecer, hemos caído en el hábitat de un pueblo de cultura muy anterior a los hombres con los cuales convivimos ayer. Hemos salido del paleolítico – de las industrias paralelas a las magdalenienses y aurignacienses, [...] – para entrar en un ámbito que me hacía retroceder los confines de la vida humana a lo más tenebroso de la noche de las edades (p. 180).

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<sup>121</sup> Alejo Carpentier, 'Manuel de Falla en París', in *Crónicas 2*, Obras Completas Series, 16 vols (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1983-94), IX (1986), 251-54 (p. 254).

[...] lost in wonder at all that could be fitted into certain tempos of this symphony which we were reading backward, from right to left, contrary to the key of G,<sup>122</sup> returning to the mesures [bars] of Genesis. At dusk we stumbled upon the habitat of people of a culture much earlier than that of the men with whom we had been living the day before. We had emerged from the Palaeolithic – with its skills paralleling those of the Magdalenian and Aurignacian, [...] – to enter a state that pushed the limits of human life back to the darkest murk of the night of ages (pp. 180-81).

In this passage, which sets the scene for the emergence of music, Carpentier appears to exploit biblical references as metaphors (as a highly educated man, he is unlikely to show allegiance to the outdated creationist paradigm)<sup>123</sup>. He also refers to the Book of Genesis in 'El mundo del tiempo detenido' (1952), which discusses indigenous musical instruments belonging to 'la Gran Orquesta de la Selva, la que escucharon nuestros antepasados del Sexto Día de la Creación' [the Great Orchestra of the Jungle, the one that our ancestors of the Sixth Day of Creation heard].<sup>124</sup> In this article, Carpentier may imply that the first musical expressions of beasts and humans are coeval, as they were created on the same day according to the Bible.

The setting of the 'Birth of Music' scene in the Palaeolithic brings in a secular notion of time and an evolutionary view of human history. As mentioned in Chapter Two, this prehistoric era was first conceptualised by John Lubbock, who was a staunch supporter of Darwin's ideas.<sup>125</sup> The effect of Carpentier's juxtaposition of theological and evolutionary time is satirical, even if his biblical frame is viewed in a metaphorical sense. (The combination of these two paradigms is familiar in literature. George Eliot,

<sup>122</sup> Carpentier may be making a pun in the phrase 'contra la clave de *sol*'. The word 'sol' can be translated not only as the musical note 'G' but also as 'sun'.

<sup>123</sup> For the archaeologist Bruce Trigger, 'It is generally acknowledged that a cultural-evolutionary perspective was widely accepted for explaining human history long before the publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of the Species*.' Bruce G. Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006 [1989]), p. 59. Trigger explains that until the Enlightenment, scholars widely regarded the events recorded in the Bible as convincing historical evidence for the history of humanity and of the cosmos (pp. 49-50).

<sup>124</sup> Alejo Carpentier, 'El mundo del tiempo detenido' (1952), in *Ese músico que llevo dentro 1*, Obras Completas Series, 16 vols (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1983-94), X (1987), 535-37 (p. 537).

<sup>125</sup> Lubbock, *Pre-historic Times*, pp. 2-3. For a discussion of Lubbock's Darwinian views of human nature, see Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought*, p. 171.



who was entirely up to date on evolutionary matters, found the Jubal myth a compelling story and developed it in her well-known 1874 poem 'The Legend of Jubal').

The paradox of parallel temporalities derived from the nineteenth-century equation of prehistoric humankind with contemporary 'primitives' offered the novelist the possibility to play with the flow of time, as well as with different and conflictive models of time. He seemed to enjoy these clashes and exploit literature's licence to represent them without resolving the conflict. In the next chapter, I shall discuss further Carpentier's experiments with different kinds of time and also the humour aimed at fetishist measurements of time.

#### IV. Solving the riddle: structural analogies with music in *El acoso*

In his article 'Problemáticas del compositor' (1957), Carpentier criticises contemporary Latin American composers for not being up to date with the formal issues faced by their European colleagues. Among these issues he highlights the reduction of instrumental forces and consequent emergence of new timbres, and the new possibilities of linking voices with instruments. He argues that

Hoy, aunque pueda creerse lo contrario, la problemática musical no gira exclusivamente en torno al atonalismo [...]. La cuestión de la forma es acaso más urgente y apremiante.<sup>126</sup>

Today, although it is possible to believe the opposite, the set of musical problems do not turn around atonalism [...]. The question of form is perhaps more urgent and pressing.

Carpentier commends Milhaud's use of rhythmically recited text over percussion in the *Oresteia* trilogy, Schoenberg's technique of *sprechgesang*, Stravinsky's simplification of language in *Les noces* and Manuel de Falla's use of Spanish prosody in *El retablo*, noting that these composers, despite having very different temperaments, tackle formal issues without sacrificing their inspiration (p. 116).

Likewise, in his article 'Novela y música' (1955), Carpentier praises the skill with which composers subdue musical ideas within given forms without sacrificing their creative freedom. He notes that poets also have a disciplined approach to structure, unlike most novelists who are often keen to 'practicar briosamente el arte del *impromptu*' [practice with brio the art of the *impromptu*].<sup>127</sup> For Carpentier, the novels *The Death of Virgil* (1945) by Hermann Broch and *Under the Volcano* (1947) by Malcolm Lowry are good examples to follow, as they are carefully structured and

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<sup>126</sup> Alejo Carpentier, 'Problemáticas del compositor', in *Ese músico que llevo dentro 3. La música en Cuba*, Obras Completas Series, 16 vols (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1983-94), XII (1987), 115-17 (p. 116).

<sup>127</sup> Alejo Carpentier, 'Novela y música' (1955), in *Ese músico que llevo dentro 3. La música en Cuba*, Obras Completas Series, 16 vols (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1983-94), XII (1987), 96-97 (p. 97).

balanced. Crucially, he suggests novelists could make literary analogies with musical forms:

¿No sería interesante que, en ciertos casos, los novelistas trabajaran dentro de una forma determinada, como tan naturalmente lo hacen los músicos, tratando de compactar lo creado en un bloque sin fisuras?... La literatura actual nos ofrece ya más de un ejemplo de esa preocupación que parece responder a una honda necesidad del espíritu (p. 97).

Wouldn't it be interesting if, in particular cases, novelists worked within a pre-determined form, as musicians do so naturally, trying to mould what is created into a unified whole?... Contemporary literature already offers us more than one example of that preoccupation which appears to respond to a fundamental need of the spirit.

Carpentier immediately took up his own challenge and tried to integrate the model of sonata form into the construction of *El acoso* (1956), a novella which narrates the flight and assassination of a young man in Havana. In this work, Carpentier also attempted to align both the time that elapses within the story's narrative and the time it takes to read it with the timeframe of Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony (1804). The structure of *El acoso* is carefully balanced, yet it corresponds only loosely with typical examples of sonata form. Whilst making substantial adaptations to the musical model, Carpentier deliberately directs readers to formal analogies with music. He did this in several interviews – 'A preguntas de *Nuestro Tiempo* cinco respuestas de Alejo Carpentier' (1958), 'Entrevista en Radio Televisión Francesa' (1963), 'Confesiones sencillas de un escritor barroco' (1964), 'Entrevista con Alejo Carpentier' (1969) and 'Nueve preguntas a Alejo Carpentier' (1969) – and in his radio lecture 'Las novelas *El acoso* y *El siglo de las luces*' (1965).<sup>128</sup> In these accounts, Carpentier also tells us that the inspiration for *El acoso* came after witnessing a man being shot by gangsters during a performance of Aeschylus's *The Libation Bearers* in the early 1940s.

<sup>128</sup> César Leante, 'Confesiones sencillas de un escritor barroco', *Cuba*, 3 (1964), 30-33; Klaus Müller-Bergh, 'Entrevista con Alejo Carpentier' (1969), in *Entrevistas: Alejo Carpentier*, ed. by Virgilio López Lemus (Havana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1985), pp. 175-78; [no author], 'A preguntas de *Nuestro Tiempo* cinco respuestas de Alejo Carpentier' (1958), in *Entrevistas: Alejo Carpentier* (see Müller-Bergh, above), pp. 48-52; [no author], 'Entrevista en Radio Televisión Francesa', in *Entrevistas: Alejo Carpentier* (see Müller-Bergh, above), pp. 72-97; Alexis Márquez Rodríguez, 'Nueve preguntas a Alejo Carpentier' (1969), in *Entrevistas: Alejo Carpentier* (see Müller-Bergh, above), pp. 166-69; Alejo Carpentier, 'Las novelas *El acoso* y *El siglo de las luces*' (1965), in *La cultura en Cuba y en el mundo*, ed. by Daniel García Santos (Havana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 2003), pp. 78-85.

Prior to my examination of Carpentier's parallels with music in *El acoso*, I will provide a summary of the story.

### **The story**

The main characters of *El acoso* are a revolutionary turned fugitive, a music student who sells tickets at a concert hall in Havana, and a prostitute named Estrella. Part I commences with the ticket seller reading Romain Rolland's *Beethoven: Les grandes époques créatrices* (1928). As the music starts, the fugitive buys a ticket and hastily slips into the hall without waiting for his change. The ticket seller has eagerly anticipated the concert for weeks, studying the Beethoven score and listening to a recording of the *Eroica* on his gramophone; however, the banknote left by the fugitive tempts him to change his plan. He sets off to visit Estrella. The fugitive, who has never attended a concert before, listens to the *Eroica* and during the Funeral March he remembers that he has heard a recording of this music many times coming from a house that turns out to be the ticket seller's. In the meantime, the ticket seller is rejected by the prostitute because she claims the banknote is a counterfeit, after which he returns to the concert hall to listen to the end of the *Eroica*.

Part II narrates the memories recalled by the fugitive during the concert, from fragmentary childhood episodes to the recent events leading to his flight from his former revolutionary comrades. After committing acts of terrorism, the fugitive is imprisoned and threatened with torture, as a result of which he denounces several of the movement's members to the police. Fearing their revenge upon his release, he hides in the house of an ill elderly woman for several days. There he hears the sound of the ticket seller's recording of the *Eroica* coming from the neighbouring house. When the old woman dies the fugitive sets out to visit Estrella and confesses to her his act of

betrayal. Believing his life to be in danger, he tries to return to his hiding place but is spotted by his pursuers. In an attempt to save his life, the fugitive enters the concert hall.

In Part III the fugitive is at the hall, hiding from his pursuers. The ticket seller returns from the prostitute's house, deeply disappointed about having missed most of the performance and not being able to satisfy his sexual desire. He hands over the forged banknote, which turns out to be genuine after all, to a policeman who is summoned to the concert after the fugitive is murdered.

### Strict parallels in critical studies

As mentioned earlier, Carpentier purposely points readers to formal analogies with music outside the novella itself. His best-known account is an interview with César Leante, 'Confesiones sencillas de un escritor barroco' (1964), from which the following passage is frequently cited in scholarly studies and editors' notes:

*El acoso* está estructurado en forma de sonata: Primera parte, exposición, tres temas, diecisiete variaciones y conclusión o coda. Un lector atento que conozca música puede observar fácilmente este desarrollo.<sup>129</sup>

*El acoso* is structured in the form of a sonata: first part, exposition, three themes, seventeen variations and conclusion or coda. Any attentive reader who knows about music can easily observe this development.

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<sup>129</sup> Leante, 'Confesiones sencillas de un escritor barroco', p. 33. This same passage is quoted in: Luis Harss, 'Alejo Carpentier, o el eterno retorno', in *Los nuestros* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1966), pp. 51-86; Volek, 'Análisis del sistema de estructuras musicales'; Esther P. Mocega-González, *La narrativa de Alejo Carpentier: El concepto del tiempo como tema fundamental* (New York: Eliseo Torres & Sons, 1975); Kurt Schnelle, 'Acosos a una conciencia', in *Recopilación de textos sobre Alejo Carpentier*, trans. by Ela Figueroa, ed. by Salvador Arias (Havana: Casa de las Américas, 1977), pp. 351-60; Steven Boldy, 'Making Sense in Carpentier's *El acoso*', *The Modern Language Review*, 85 (1990), 612-22; Jesús Benítez Villalba, 'La revolución traicionada: Carpentier y Beethoven: *El acoso* y la Sinfonía Eroica', in *Hispanoamérica en sus textos*, ed. by Eva Valcárcel (La Coruña: Universidade da Coruña, 1993), pp. 11-20; Sally Harvey, *Carpentier's Proustian Fiction: The Influence of Marcel Proust on Alejo Carpentier* (London: Tamesis, 1994); Rubio Navarro, *Música y escritura en Alejo Carpentier* (Salamanca: Universidad de Alicante, 1999), among others. Examples of editions of *El acoso* that use this quotation on their back covers are Ediciones Alfaguara (Madrid, 1983) and Editorial Precursora (Buenos Aires, 1978).

This source presents a number of anomalies which have not been questioned by scholars. The expression ‘the form of a sonata’ seems to evoke an instrumental piece consisting of several movements, yet the use of the term ‘exposition’ suggests that the intended model was sonata form, which most generally applies to a single movement of a musical work rather than the work in its entirety.<sup>130</sup> Moreover, Leante’s text does not specify which music elements match each of the three parts of the novella. It seems probable that the exposition and the three subjects are to be thought of as corresponding to Part I, the variations to Part II, and the conclusion or coda to Part III. But then, following the paratactic nature of variations in a musical composition, each variation should logically match a chapter in Part II. Accordingly, the number of variations should be thirteen and not seventeen.

Emil Volek uses Leante’s text as the starting point for his analysis of *El acoso*’s structure. In his article ‘Análisis del sistema de estructuras musicales e interpretación de *El acoso* de Alejo Carpentier’ (1969), he contends that Carpentier ‘encaminó la narrativa hacia una ambiciosa simbiosis con las formas musicales’ [directed his narrative towards an ambitious symbiosis with musical forms].<sup>131</sup>

Volek assumes that *El acoso* parallels sonata form (p. 3). He associates Part I with the exposition, whereby the ticket seller stands for both the introduction theme and the concluding theme, and the fugitive represents the main theme (p. 11). The fact that the character Estrella is not considered as a theme is notable, for the actions of this character do have plot significance. According to Volek, Part I must be repeated: ‘Debería y está ideada de modo que pueda (p. 11)’ [it should and is conceived in a way that it can]. But if Carpentier wanted to indicate that *El acoso*’s Part I was to be read twice, he could have done so by including instructions to the reader in the preface or

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<sup>130</sup> Some but not all music pieces called fantasies are in sonata form. A small number of experimental fantasies following sonata form are in more than one movement, for instance Schubert’s *Wanderer fantasy* (c. 1820), the *Fantasy for Violin and Piano* and the *Fantasy in F minor* for two pianos (1828), Schoenberg’s *String Quartet No. 1 in D minor* (1905) and *Kammersymphonie No. 1* (1906).

<sup>131</sup> Volek, ‘Análisis del sistema de estructuras musicales’, p. 1.

inserting a graphic sign like a repeat bar line at the end of that section. Most importantly, the effect produced by a literal repetition of a narrative section is not comparable with that of a literal repetition of a musical passage, as the process of reading differs substantially from listening to a musical performance.

Volek believes Part II corresponds to the development section of sonata form, understood according to ‘los principios de la fuga, tanto de la forma misma (el principio organizador) como de la composición (p. 5)’ [the principles of fugue, as much in its form (its organising principle) as in its composition]<sup>132</sup>. Assuming that the number of variations is seventeen (it has already been pointed that the number in Leante’s article appears to be wrong), Volek fits thirteen variations into Part II and the remaining four into Part III (p. 4). Such a forced interpretation, which mingles rather different musical forms, would not have been necessary had Volek interpreted Leante’s article more critically.

Volek summarises his interpretation of *El acoso*’s structure in a ‘fórmula de ejecución’ [performance formula], suggesting that the novella is a music score to be performed:

Exposición (alegro) [sic], tres secciones: 1) el tema de introducción – el taquillero; 2) el tema principal – el acosado; 3) el tema final – el taquillero.  
Desarrollo (adagio), 13 variaciones del tema principal en forma de la fuga doble, libre, a dos voces.  
Recapitulación (alegro) [sic], 4 variaciones de ambos temas y el propio final o (y) coda: repetición de la exposición (ahora variaciones 14-16) y la tercera parte de la novela: 17) el acosado y 18) el final – el taquillero.  
En conjunto existen, pues, 21 secciones. Nuestra fórmula corresponde perfectamente a la sugerencia del autor (pp. 11-12).

Exposition (allegro), three sections: 1) the opening theme – the ticket seller; 2) the main theme – the fugitive; 3) the final theme – the ticket seller.  
Development (adagio), 13 variations on the main theme in the form of a double, free, two-part fugue.  
Recapitulation (allegro), 4 variations on both themes and the proper ending or (and) coda: repetition of the exposition (now variations 14-16) and the third part of the novel: 17) the fugitive and 18) the ending – the ticket seller.  
There are in total, then, 21 sections. Our formula perfectly corresponds with the author’s suggestion.

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<sup>132</sup> The Spanish word ‘fuga’ has two possible meanings in English, ‘fugue’ and ‘flight’. Possibly, Volek is intending a pun that connects the musical form with the fugitive’s attempted escape.

Volek's attempt to solve the question of *El acoso*'s form by merging the sections of a sonata form into the movements of a sonata is unsatisfactory. Firstly, sonata form and sonata are two different musical models. Secondly, performance in the Western musical tradition does not modify the text to the extent that entirely new structures are generated – with the exception of aleatory music or pieces that include improvisatory sections. Thirdly, in sonata form the repeat of the exposition takes place before the development section and not in the recapitulation, as in Volek's 'performance formula'.

Another scholar attempting literal parallels with music is Helmy Giacomán, who in his article 'La relación músico-literaria entre la Tercera Sinfonía *Eroica* de Beethoven y la novela *El acoso* de Alejo Carpentier' (1968) concludes that the themes of *El acoso* and the *Eroica* Symphony match 'en detalle' [in detail].<sup>133</sup> Giacomán proposes that the six characters of the novella (the ticket seller, the fugitive, the elderly woman, Estrella and the two pursuers) 'corresponden, exactamente, a los temas y variaciones más destacados en la sinfonía (p. 444) [correspond, exactly, to the most prominent themes and variations of the Symphony], citing *A Dictionary of Musical Themes* by Harold Barlow and Sam Morgenstern (1948) as alleged evidence.<sup>134</sup> He neither provides a rationale for selecting the six most important of the sixteen themes listed by Barlow and Morgenstern, nor does he show an understanding of musical construction and associated terminology. For instance, he calls the opening theme of the Symphony 'motivo AI' and associates it with the fugitive (p. 445):



Example 1: Beethoven's Symphony No. 3, Op. 55 *Eroica*, Allegro con brio, bars 3-8.

<sup>133</sup> Giacomán, 'La relación músico-literaria entre la Tercera Sinfonía *Eroica* de Beethoven y la novela *El acoso* de Alejo Carpentier', p. 464.

<sup>134</sup> Harold Barlow and Sam Morgenstern, *A Dictionary of Musical Themes* (New York: Crown, 1948). For the themes of the *Eroica*, see pp. 69-70.



The ticket seller is 'tema A II', although this is not a theme in itself but a figuration derived from the opening theme above (p. 445):



**Example 2: Beethoven's Symphony No. 3, Op. 55 *Eroica*, Allegro con brio, bars 7-15.**

Not surprisingly, this passage is not listed by Barlow and Morgenstern. Next, Giacomani chronologically relates various elements of the novella (e.g. events, syntax) with elements of the *Eroica* (e.g. tonalities, timings). Part II, which narrates the fugitive's past memories recalled during the concert, is remarkably linked to the Symphony's Funeral March, the Scherzo and the Finale (pp. 451-61), despite the fact that the actual lapse of time in the novella is vastly shorter. Moreover, the non-chronological arrangement of the events in Part II is not comparable with the established order of musical events in the Symphony. This is perhaps the most important factor which makes literal mappings of the music onto the novella unworkable. Giacomani's radical claim that the two works literally correspond as wholes, based on an inconsistent approach and insecure evidence, founders on fundamental structural differences between the literary and musical works in question.

Volek's and Giacomani's articles support and reinforce the idea that strict literary parallels with music are possible. Both are highly speculative and share a lack of rigour in the analysis of musical constructions. These studies presuppose a musically literate reader with knowledge of musical analysis. Not surprisingly, many literary critics cite these articles but do not analyse them in detail.

## Carpentier's temporal and formal parallels

In contrast with previous studies, my analysis of analogies with music in *El acoso* will draw on Carpentier's radio lecture 'Las novelas *El acoso* y *El siglo de las luces*' (1965).

This script seems to be more reliable than Leante's text, and includes a much more detailed description of temporal and formal aspects in the novella:

Poco a poco, fui pensando que podía hacerse una novela en que el tiempo de lectura concordara con el tiempo de la acción, y el tiempo de la acción, a su vez, con una unidad de medida, es decir, con algo que, por sus limitaciones de tiempo, pudiera darle al lector la idea de que la acción transcurre entre tales y tales minutos. Se me ocurrió que durante una ejecución de la Sinfonía *Heroica* en el teatro, entonces llamado Auditorium, y hoy Teatro Amadeo Roldán, podía inscribirse la tragedia, con otra tragedia a la vez dentro, que es la tragedia de *Las Coéforas*, de Esquilo, representada en la Universidad. Por lo tanto, la novela *El acoso*, que no es una novela muy larga, que es una novela que creo que puede leerse en unas tres horas, transcurre dentro del tiempo de duración de una correcta ejecución de la Sinfonía *Heroica* de Beethoven, o sea, generalmente, son unos cincuenta y tantos minutos. [...] Ahora bien, me dije: ¿no será posible, ya que voy a inscribir esta acción dentro del tiempo de duración de la Sinfonía *Heroica*, adaptar a la novela misma una forma, que es lo que se llama en música, la forma sonata? Cuando se habla de una sinfonía, se habla de un concierto, se habla de una sonata, se habla, en realidad, de una misma cosa. La sinfonía es una sonata para muchos instrumentos; el concierto es una sonata para orquesta o pequeño conjunto o conjunto de cámara y un instrumento que desempeña un papel capital. En cuanto a la sonata – invirtiendo el razonamiento – viene a ser una sinfonía, sencillamente, para pocos instrumentos e incluso, en ciertos casos, para dos instrumentos y, acaso, hasta para uno solo. Traté, pues, en *El acoso*, de adaptar la forma sonata y construí la novela de la manera siguiente: primera parte, tres personajes, tres temas; segunda parte de la novela, variaciones; tercera parte, recapitulación o coda.<sup>135</sup>

Increasingly, I was thinking that it was possible to write a novel in which the time taken to read it would equate with the duration of the action, and the duration of the action, in turn, would equate with a unit of measurement, that is, with something that, by its time limits, could give the reader the idea that the action takes place between such and such minutes. It occurred to me that during a performance of the *Eroica* Symphony in the theatre, then called Auditorium and nowadays Teatro Amadeo Roldán, the tragedy could be inserted with another tragedy inside, which is the tragedy of *Choephoroe* [*The Libation Bearers*] by Aeschylus, performed at the university. Therefore the novella *El acoso*, which is not very long, which is a novella that I think can be read in around three hours, takes place within the duration of a correct performance of the *Eroica* Symphony by Beethoven, that is, generally, fifty-odd minutes. [...] I said to myself: would not it be possible, as I am going to inscribe this action within the duration of the *Eroica* Symphony, to adapt a form to the novel itself, a form which in music is called sonata form? When one talks about a symphony, a concerto, a sonata, one is talking, in fact, about the same thing. A symphony is a sonata for many instruments; a concerto is a sonata for an orchestra or small group or chamber ensemble and an instrument that plays a key role. Inverting the reasoning, with regard to the sonata, it becomes a symphony, simply, for just a few instruments and even, in some cases, for two instruments and, maybe, even for only one. I tried, then, in *El acoso*, to adapt sonata form and constructed the novel in the following way: first part, three characters, three themes; second part, variations; third part, recapitulation or coda.

<sup>135</sup> Carpentier, 'Las novelas *El acoso* y *El siglo de las luces*', pp. 78-79.

The conception of *El acoso* appears to be guided by the principles of the unities of time, place and action developed by Renaissance and post-Renaissance critics after Aristotle's ideas on tragedy. In his *Poetics* (c. 335 BCE), Aristotle holds that 'tragedy attempts as far as possible to keep within one revolution of the sun or [only] to exceed this a little', and that its plot 'ought to represent a single action, and a whole one at that'.<sup>136</sup> As formulated by Jean Mairet in *Sophonisbe* (1634) and later by Nicolas Boileau in *L'Art poétique* (1674), the three unities require that any serious play should have a unified action without the distractions of a subplot, representing events of a single day or ideally the same time as the duration of the performance itself within a single setting, which may include different parts of the same city.<sup>137</sup>

Carpentier puts aside the obvious fact that reading speed can be quite different from person to person. Moreover, he apparently assumes that *El acoso* can be read in a linear and non-interrupted way. If this was the case, the experience of reading the novella in one sitting might be compared with listening to a single act of some of the longest existing operas, for instance Wagner's *Götterdämmerung* (1876), Berg's *Lulu* (1929-35), Birtwistle's *The Mask of Orpheus* (1986) and all seven operas of Stockhausen's *Licht* cycle (1977-2003).

It is hard to believe Carpentier is serious about applying the notion of 'correctness' to the specific timing of a performance. Most musicians would certainly disagree with this idea. Moreover, Carpentier is not consistent about the length of such a 'correct' performance: in his radio lecture 'Las novelas *El acoso* y *El siglo de las luces*' quoted above, the timing is fifty-odd minutes, in his interview with French Radio

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<sup>136</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics I*, trans. by Richard Janko (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987 [c. 335 BCE]), pp. 7, 12. Carpentier's references to ancient Greece have been discussed in Amaury Carbón Sierra, 'La cultura grecolatina en dos novelas de Alejo Carpentier', *Revista Universidad de La Habana*, 223 (1984), 67-89, and Inmaculada López Calahorra, 'Un puente entre Aristóteles y Alejo Carpentier', *Casa de las Américas*, 241 (2005), 76-82.

<sup>137</sup> Chris Baldick, 'The unities', in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 267-68.

Television it is forty-five, and in the novella itself it is forty-six.<sup>138</sup> Later on in this chapter, I shall suggest a possible origin for Carpentier's notion of the 'correct' timing.

Carpentier's temporal parallels seem unclear, as the historical timeframe of the events narrated in the whole novella – which span from the fugitive's childhood to events taking place after the concert – is longer than the assumed reading time and duration of the Symphony. Possibly, the historical time of the events narrated in Parts I and III could be compared with an estimated timeframe of the *Eroica*, a relationship which Gérard Genette would term a *scene*.<sup>139</sup>

In Part II, two temporal relationships are possible, depending on what is considered as historical time. If one took the entire span of the fugitive's narration, then the reading time would be much shorter than this. Gérard Genette would this call a *summary*. But the real time during which these memories are recalled by the fugitive seems more pertinent. At the end of Chapter 2 of Part I, this character comments that 'Ha concluido la marcha fúnebre [...]; ahora habrá algo como una danza (pp. 26-27)' ['The funeral march is over [...]; now comes something like a dance (p. 18)']. At the beginning of Chapter 1 of Part III, he tells us that the musicians, 'con esos instrumentos que parecen grandes resortes terminaron de tocar su música de jaurías bendecidas, su misa de cazadores (p. 151)' ['their instruments looking like huge springs, finished playing the music for hunting dogs that have been blessed, finished the hunters' Mass (p. 115)']. The fugitive's remarks strongly suggest that the actual time during which the memories narrated in Part II are recalled span from the end of the Funeral March to the

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<sup>138</sup> Carpentier, 'Las novelas *El acoso* y *El siglo de las luces*', p. 79; 'Entrevista en Radio Televisión Francesa', p. 92; Alejo Carpentier, *El acoso* (Barcelona: Bruguera, 1979), pp. 38, 159 [Alejo Carpentier, *The Chase*, trans. by Alfred Mac Adam (London: André Deutsch, 1990), pp. 27-28, 122].

<sup>139</sup> Genette compares historical time with the number of pages per event, assuming an average reading speed. He reduces the most common relations of duration to *summary* (when the narrative duration is greatly reduced with respect to the historical duration of the events narrated), *scene* (when narrative and historical time are supposed to be nearly equal), *stasis* (when the narrative discourse continues while historical time is at a standstill) and *ellipsis* (when a certain amount of historical time is covered in a zero amount of narrative). Gérard Genette, 'Time and Narrative in *A la recherche du temps perdu*', in *Aspects of Narrative*, trans. by Paul de Man, ed. by J. Hillis Miller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), pp. 93-118 (pp. 101-02).

outer sections of the Scherzo and Trio played by the horns. Thus, the actual historical time is massively reduced with respect to the narrative duration, resembling a *stasis*. It appears, then, that Carpentier does not really consider Part II as part of the action; in which case parallels between the historical, reading and performance times might only apply to Parts I and III.

Just as the temporal parallels appear somehow ambiguous, so does Carpentier's idea of imitating a musical form, as he blurs the question of whether the pattern used is that of a sonata form or that of a sonata as a whole. On one hand, he explicitly refers to sonata form as his intended model. On the other, he equates sonata form with the structure of a symphony, a concerto and a sonata, all of which are typically in several movements. Because Carpentier first appeals to sonata form, the following discussion will use terminology associated with this musical form.

Each of the three chapters in Part I gives prominence to a different character. Since characters are associated with musical themes and the narrative is divided into three chapters, it seems logical to infer that *El acoso* has an exposition with three subject groups. Although the majority of musical analysis texts from the eighteenth century to the present day describe the exposition as having two subject areas, a small number of theorists conceived this section as having three areas. Adolf Bernhard Marx, in his *Lehre von der musikalischen Komposition* (1837-88), refers to a third subject area which he calls *Schlusssatz*. Julio Bas, in his *Tratado de la forma musical* (1913) – which circulated widely in Latin America – describes an independent bridge section with its own thematic features.<sup>140</sup>

In a musical composition, the exposition's subject areas are differentiated harmonically. The modulation out of the tonic at the end of this section can be interpreted as either the dominant of the tonic when the exposition repeats, or the key of

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<sup>140</sup> Adolf Bernhard Marx, *Die Lehre von der musikalischen Komposition*, 4 vols (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1837-88), III (1879), 201-54; Julio Bas, *Tratado de la forma musical* (Buenos Aires: Ricordi Americana, 1947 [1913]), p. 270.

the development section that follows. One may argue that in *El acoso*, the backdrop against which the different characters appear serves the purpose of distinguishing the subject areas. Pressing this comparison further, it could be argued that the concert hall corresponds to the tonic and Estrella's house to the contrasting key. The conclusion of Chapter Three of Part I in the concert hall seems at odds with the harmonic structure of a musical movement in sonata form, for the exposition generally ends in a contrasting key.

Part II parallels some very general features of the development section of sonata form. Firstly, it reshapes some of the thematic material of the exposition – the theme of the fugitive. Secondly, the end of this section prepares the recapitulation – the fugitive entering the concert hall at the end of the last chapter. However, the fact that this portion of the novella is divided into thirteen chapters in a clearly discontinuous sequence makes it clear that it is not strictly comparable with the development section of sonata form. Understandably, Carpentier did not term it development section but variations. Yet in music, sets of variations are usually freestanding pieces or movements in larger works rather than part of a movement in sonata form.

The biblical epigraph for Part II, 'and these things hast thou hid in thine heart: I know that this is with thee' (Job 10. 13) from Job's dramatic dialogue with three friends about the suffering inherent in human existence, points to the themes of reminiscence and suffering which are present in all thirteen chapters of Part II. In a musical sense, this epigraph may be interpreted as a borrowed theme, that is the quotation of a well-known melody or harmonic scheme that is used as a basis for a set of variations. In the novella, however, the fundamental question of the Book of Job, 'Why do the innocent suffer?', produces irony as the reader learns that the fugitive is not innocent. In concordance with the association of characters with musical themes in Part I, one may suggest that the theme for variations in Part II is the fugitive (being reminiscent of his sufferings).

Calvin Brown, in his article 'Theme and Variations as a Literary Form' (1978), identifies several ways in which poetry and novels can imitate this musical form. These may include a change of imagery or its interpretation, the use of different meters or verse forms, and the variation of sound patterns, general content, tone and point of view. Brown remarks that 'as a general rule, in literature some fairly striking alteration is required if the effect of variation is to be achieved'.<sup>141</sup> In *El acoso*, Carpentier achieves such differentiation by manipulating the chronological sequence of events in Part II in a prominent way. Frances Weber, in her article '*El acoso*: Alejo Carpentier's War on Time' (1963), rearranged the chronology of individual events.<sup>142</sup> Because of the paratactic nature of musical variations, I would suggest reordering the sequence by chapters instead. By looking at the temporal and spatial references given by the fugitive's narration, it appears that the thirteen chapters could be arranged as follows: 3 4 5 2 6 7 8 9 10 11 1 12 13. (Here, as in my examination of Antonio Benítez Rojo's parallel of 'Viaje a la semilla' with a crab canon in Chapter One, I am drawing on the Russian Formalists' distinction between *fabula* and *sjuzet*). However, the fugitive's references are sometimes very unclear because the narration is in stream of consciousness, a literary method that may violate the norms of grammar, syntax and logic.

Part III brings back two of the three themes of Part I in inverted order, first the fugitive then the ticket seller. (In music, the recapitulation contains the most important ideas from the exposition, and may omit some thematic material. In this sense, the absence of Estrella in Part III is not necessarily problematic.) Carpentier's description of this section as either a recapitulation or a coda may seem unusual if the model is sonata form, for the recapitulation is an inherent part of sonata form and the coda (a section

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<sup>141</sup> Brown, 'Theme and Variations as a Literary Form', p. 38.

<sup>142</sup> Frances W. Weber, '*El acoso*: Alejo Carpentier's War on Time', *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 78 (1963), 440-48 (p. 441).

which comes after the closing group) may or may not be employed in musical compositions. But if Part II was seen as a freestanding set of variations, then it would be theoretically plausible to view Part III as the novella's coda. However, this interpretation would be at odds with Carpentier's remarks about modelling the structure of *El acoso* on sonata form.

Carpentier seems to be holding different musical forms in tension. Part I and III may be compared with a movement without a development section, for instance a sonatina. Alternatively, the novella may be interpreted as a set of variations incorporating some sonata form procedures. Most telling in this regard is Carpentier's use of word play, which relies on general meanings of musical terms. In many literary works, themes are exposed at the outset and are subsequently developed and recapitulated, which does not necessarily imply that they are in sonata form.

### **Whose 'correct' timing?**

As mentioned earlier, Carpentier constructs his temporal parallels starting from the idea that the *Eroica* should be performed within a 'correct' timing. I will now attempt to find out the origin of this intriguing notion.

There is no evidence that Beethoven stipulated timings for this work, although he did specify metronome markings for his symphonies in 1817, thirteen years after the *Eroica* was completed. There has been much debate about how reliable these markings are. Firstly, metronomes in the early nineteenth century were widely subject to error and *rubato* was used with great freedom. Secondly, these markings were not established while an orchestra was playing but with the composer on the piano while his nephew swung the metronome (someone playing the piano tends to have a faster tempo than a



conductor, as there are issues of co-ordination). Thirdly, Beethoven's deafness was problematic by this date.

The only accounts of orchestral timings of Beethoven's period appear to be those of the English conductor Sir George Smart, who timed around 140 performances between 1819 and 1843. Smart conducted the first performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony at the Royal Philharmonic Society in 1825 and recalled that the composer himself had given him 'the time, by playing the subjects on the pianoforte, of many movements of his symphonies'.<sup>143</sup> It could be then argued that his timings have a certain authenticity through his personal connection with the composer. Smart gives two different timings of the *Eroica* conducted by him, forty-one minutes in 1820 and fifty minutes in 1838, neither of which coincides with Carpentier's.<sup>144</sup>

The *Eroica* is among the most frequently played pieces of the orchestral repertoire. Rather than speculating as to which live performance may possibly relate to the author's notion of 'correct' timing, it seems more promising to link such a notion to his extensive radio work, where he would have been used to paying close attention to very precise timings.<sup>145</sup> Although live performances were common in broadcasting studios, measuring timings from recordings stands as a more objective and practical method.

In his radio lecture 'Las novelas *El acoso* y *El siglo de las luces*', Carpentier does not explicitly link the 'correct' duration notion to his broadcasting experience, yet he mentions his interest in synchronising music to films and plays, an activity in which timings are also highly relevant. He recounts that in the early 1940s, at the time of the conception of *El acoso*,

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<sup>143</sup> Quoted in Nicholas Temperley, 'Tempo and Repeats in the Early Nineteenth Century', *Music & Letters*, 47 (1966), 323-36 (p. 335).

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 330.

<sup>145</sup> For an account on Carpentier's radio activities, see Oscar Luis López, *Alejo Carpentier y la radio* (Havana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 2003).

[...] después de haberme ocupado de la sincronización de algunas películas, me interesaba mucho los problemas relacionados con la sincronización musical, con el posible enlace de la voz humana con la música y con el posible acompañamiento de ciertas acciones dramáticas con determinadas obras que respondieran a su carácter por esas misteriosas afinidades que suelen surgir entre dos obras de arte.<sup>146</sup>

[...] after having been in charge of synchronising several films, I became very interested in issues related to musical synchronisation, the possibilities of linking of the human voice with music, and the possibilities of accompanying certain dramatic actions with certain works that would respond to their character through those strange affinities which tend to emerge between two works of art.

The practicality of measuring timings from recordings strongly suggests that the notion of the 'correct' timing was inspired by an existing one. *El acoso* refers to a recording of approximately forty-six minutes which was made by an important conductor. Before the ticket seller leaves for the prostitute's house, we are told:

Nadie, aquí, podría jactarse de haberse acercado a la Sinfonía con mayor devoción que él [el taquillero], al cabo de semanas de estudio, partitura en mano, ante los discos viejos que todavía sonaban bien. Aquel director de reciente celebridad no podía dirigirla mejor que el insigne especialista de sus placas (p. 16).

No-one here could boast of having approached the symphony with greater devotion than he [the ticket seller], after weeks of study, score in hand, standing before the old records that still sounded fine. The newly famous conductor could not direct it better than the illustrious expert on his records (p. 10).

And upon his return to the concert hall:

"¿Falta mucho?" – preguntó [el portero], sorprendido de verlo regresar. "Unos nueve minutos" – respondió, añadiendo luego, para alardear de saber: "Bien dirigida la obra no debe pasar de cuarenta y seis [minutos]" (p. 38).

'Is there much to go?' he [the doorman] asked, surprised to see the ticket seller return. 'About nine minutes,' the ticket seller answered, adding, just to show off, 'If it's properly directed, the work should not exceed forty-six minutes' (pp. 27-28).

Having missed most of the concert, the ticket seller judges the live performance only in relation to the duration of the recording he owns: 'El director es infecto; llevó la Sinfonía de tal modo que no debe haber durado sus cuarenta y seis minutos (p. 159)'

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<sup>146</sup> Carpentier, 'Las novelas *El acoso* y *El siglo de las luces*', p. 78. In this same radio programme, Carpentier tells he participated in the theatre performance which inspired the story of *El acoso*, 'a la que yo había adaptado fragmentos de una partitura de Darius Milhaud (p. 78)' [to which I had adapted fragments of a score by Darius Milhaud]. It seems very plausible he was using excerpts from Milhaud's *Oresteia* trilogy, which he highlights in 'Los orígenes de la música y la música primitiva' as an exemplary contemporary expression of primeval invocation. This account also brings to mind the protagonist of *Los pasos perdidos*, who composes and synchronises music for films.

[‘The conductor is vile; the way he led the symphony, it couldn’t have lasted its full forty-six minutes (p. 122)’].

Possible originals for this recording are those made by Pfitzner (1929), Toscanini (1938 and 1939), Koussevitzky (1945) and Kleiber (1948 and 1950), all of which have a total duration of approximately forty-six minutes.<sup>147</sup> Another clue is given by the fugitive, who while listening to the Symphony at the concert hall, recalls ‘el silencio, tantas veces “escuchado” (p. 151)’ [‘the silence he’d *heard* so often (p. 115)’] in the ticket seller’s recording. This noticeable pause was somewhere between the ‘música de jaurías bendecidas’ [‘music for hunting dogs that have been blessed’] – possibly the outer sections of the Scherzo and Trio – and the ‘música a saltitos (p. 151)’ [‘music in little jumps’ (p. 115)’] – possibly the Finale from bar 12 and especially from bar 20, where the strings and woodwind play out of synchronisation.<sup>148</sup>

Of the six recordings listed above, Erich Kleiber’s 1950 version, conducting the Concertgebouw Orchestra, appears to be the most likely contender, as it has an idiosyncratic *luftpause* (a pause for breath) in the Scherzo.<sup>149</sup> Carpentier’s journalistic articles add significant contextual evidence. In these he referred to Kleiber more than any other conductor, calling him ‘uno de los más ilustres directores del tiempo presente’ [one of the most illustrious conductors of the present time] and praising ‘su

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<sup>147</sup> Eric Grunin, ‘Discography’, in *An Eroica Project* <<http://www.grunin.com/eroica/index.htm>> [accessed 22 May 2010]. This source lists the durations of approximately 500 recordings of the *Eroica*. The variation of timings is vast. The first movement alone ranges from 12’06” (London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Coates, 1926) to 21’03” (New Japan Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Asahina, 1989).

<sup>148</sup> Long pieces like the *Eroica* came on many 78rpm sides, so the gap could potentially result from the changing of sides. However, the fugitive seems to hear the pause in only one place. The sustained chord of four bars at the end of the Scherzo’s Trio could also sound like a pause to some.

<sup>149</sup> Kleiber’s *Eroica* was first released on 78 (Decca AX 383/9). It was re-issued as LP (Decca LXT 2546/7) and as CD (Decca 475 6080). Jonathan Woolf, in his review of the latest re-issue, mentions the distinct pause:

Demerits are the lack of the first movement exposition repeat (which accounts for the timing difference between this recording and that made in Vienna three years later where Kleiber plays the repeat), a few orchestral imperfections, and an idiosyncratic *luftpause* in the Scherzo, which was something he clearly brooded over because he rectified it in Vienna [in his 1953 recording with the Vienna PO].

Jonathan Woolf, ‘Erich Kleiber. Decca Recordings 1949-1955’, in *Music Web International* (2004) <<http://www.musicweb-international.com/classrev/2004/Sept04/Kleiber.htm>> [accessed 31 May 2010]

comprensión de los estilos, su cultura, su prodigiosa inteligencia musical' [his understanding of styles, his cultural knowledge, his prodigious musical intelligence].<sup>150</sup> In 1956, the year of the conductor's death, Carpentier wrote four articles about him for *El Nacional*, 'El recuerdo de Kleiber (I)', 'El recuerdo de Kleiber (II)', 'Una pérdida irreparable' and 'Genio y figura'.<sup>151</sup> As *El acoso* was first published in that same year, this might be Carpentier's rather quirky tribute to this musical hero.

In the next chapter, I shall explore further how the author uses irony in performance situations.

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<sup>150</sup> Alejo Carpentier, 'Kleiber vendrá a Venezuela' (1952), in *Ese músico que llevo dentro 1*, Obras Completas, 16 vols (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1983-94), X (1987), 347-49 (pp. 347-48).

<sup>151</sup> Alejo Carpentier, 'El recuerdo de Kleiber (I)' (1956), in *Ese músico que llevo dentro 1*, Obras Completas Series, 16 vols (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1983-94), X (1987), 349-51; 'El recuerdo de Kleiber (II)' (1956) (see Carpentier, Obras Completas Series, X, above), 351-53; 'Una pérdida irreparable' (1956) (see Carpentier, Obras Completas Series, X, above), 353-55; and 'Genio y figura' (1956) (see Carpentier, Obras Completas Series, X, above), 355-57.

## V. Cheers and jeers: performance, ideology and irony

### in *El acoso* and *La consagración de la primavera*

Carpentier sabe que las revoluciones culturales no son enemigas de las revoluciones sociales, sino que ambas se complementan e iluminan.<sup>152</sup>

Carpentier knows that cultural revolutions are not enemies of social revolutions, but both complement and illuminate each other.

Carlos Fuentes, *La nueva novela hispanoamericana* (1969).

In an interview with French Television (1963), Carpentier refers to the political circumstances and characters that inspired the story of *El acoso*. He explains that his novella

[...] es un reflejo de la época en que yo era estudiante en la Universidad, en que viví mis primeras luchas políticas. Era una época en que los estudiantes [...] que tenían ideas políticas avanzadas y estaban descontentos con el régimen de entonces, que era realmente terrible – era la famosa tiranía de Machado [1925-33] –; esos estudiantes derrocharon heroísmo, algunos dieron su vida en esa lucha, pero tenían un defecto: y era el heroísmo por el heroísmo, era la indignación, era la rebelión por la rebelión. [...] Me impresionaba ver tantos sacrificios inútiles, en cierto sentido, en medio de esa lucha [...] que evidentemente era de todos modos heroica. [...] Por esta razón, *El acoso* es quizás mi único libro, creo, que puede parecer pesimista, algo desesperado, porque es la historia de un esfuerzo inútil.<sup>153</sup>

[...] is a reflection of the time when I was a student at the University, when I experienced my first political struggles. It was a time when the students [...] who had advanced political ideas and were discontented with the regime, which was really terrible – it was the famous tyranny of Machado [1925-33] –; those students wasted their heroism, some gave their lives in that struggle, but they were misguided: and it was heroism for the sake of heroism, it was outrage, it was rebellion for the sake of rebellion. [...] In a sense, I was impressed to see so many useless sacrifices in the middle of that struggle [...] that evidently was heroic anyway. [...] For this reason, *El acoso* is perhaps my only book, I think, that may seem pessimistic, even desperate, because it is the story of a wasted effort.

To accompany these heroic yet useless sacrifices, Carpentier uses Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony. This music has long been taken as an emblem for the hope of freedom and

<sup>152</sup> Carlos Fuentes, *La nueva novela hispanoamericana* (Mexico City: Editorial Joaquín Mortiz, 1969), p. 57.

<sup>153</sup> 'Entrevista en Radio Televisión Francesa', p. 92

escape from tyranny, with its famous anecdote concerning Beethoven's erasing of its dedication to Bonaparte. In Carpentier's novel, this piece is the accompaniment to the fugitive's captivity and also a hope of escape when he hears it performed live.

In opposition to the portrayal of wasted political effort in *El acoso*, *La consagración de la primavera* (1978) presents a triumphant depiction of the Cuban Revolution. In this novel, Carpentier intended to 'expresar *el epos* de una época revolucionaria en el mundo, en lo que concierne a América Latina y a mi país' [give expression to *the epos* of a revolutionary epoch in the world, concerning Latin America and my country], as he stated it in an interview with Manuel Osorio (1980).<sup>154</sup> *La consagración* very much responds to his own call to turn current socio-political events into literary topics, as explained in his famous essay 'Problemática de la actual novela latinoamericana' (1964):

[...] donde hay bloques humanos en presencia, en pugna, en ascenso o descenso, en miseria u opulencia, en quiebra o encumbramiento, la materia a tratar, para el novelista, se torna materia épica. [...] Ahí, en la expresión del hervor de ese plasma humano, está la auténtica materia épica para el novelista nuestro. Bien lo entendieron aquellos que pudieron seguir de cerca el proceso de la Revolución Cubana y comienzan [...] a escribir novelas que resulten épicas.<sup>155</sup>

[...] where there are strata of humanity present, in conflict, ascending or descending, in misery or opulence, in bankruptcy or prosperity, the subject matter becomes epic material for the novelist. [...] There, in the expression of the boiling of that human plasma, lies the authentic epic material for our novelist. Those who could follow the Cuban Revolution closely could well understand that, and in the following years, they begin [...] to write novels that prove to be epic.

Central to *La consagración de la primavera* is Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, which is used as a means to express not only aesthetic ideas but also revolutionary political impulses. As mentioned in Chapter One, Carpentier's politicised interpretation of *The Rite* is at odds with Stravinsky's own artistic and political attitudes, as well as with the performance history of this piece.

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<sup>154</sup> Manuel Osorio, 'La vida es la materia misma de la escritura' (1980), in *Entrevistas: Alejo Carpentier*, ed. by Virgilio López Lemus (Havana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1985), pp. 483-95 (p. 486).

<sup>155</sup> Alejo Carpentier, 'Problemática de la actual novela latinoamericana' (1964), in *Ensayos, Obras Completas Series*, 16 vols (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1983-94), XIII (1990), 11-44 (pp. 43-44).

In this chapter, I explore a number of musical performances narrated in *El acoso* and *La consagración de la primavera*. In particular, I analyse the ways in which music is used to convey irony and political ideology, and the incongruities that result from these connections, as perceived both by the characters and by the reader. Crucial to the reader's perception of these situations of irony is the knowledge of composers, musical works, performers and contexts referred to in the texts, on which Carpentier relies. I shall begin by examining *El acoso*.

### **Performances in *El acoso***

For the ticket seller, the concert hall represents both frustration and hope. 'Detrás de una reja como los monos (pp. 8, 11, 158)' ['In a cage like a monkey (pp. 4, 7, 121)'] is how he constantly sees himself. Selling tickets, a petty job that nevertheless may grant him 'el entendimiento de lo grande (p. 11)' [an apprehension of greatness]<sup>156</sup> as he studies Beethoven's score and biography. However, an urgent desire to visit Estrella the prostitute overrides his ideas about the sublime. When leaving the theatre, he thinks condescendingly about the conductor of the live performance of the *Eroica*:

Podía arrogarse la facultad de no escuchar lo que sonaba en aquel concierto, sin faltar a la memoria del Genio (p. 16).

He could proudly claim the privilege of not listening to what was being played without being disrespectful to the memory of the Genius (p. 10).

After the prostitute rejects him, deep remorse follows: 'al llegar la gran noche, había dejado la Sublime Concepción por el calor de una ramera (p. 40)' ['But when the great night came, he abandoned the Sublime Concept for the heat of a whore (p. 29)']. The theatre, now seen as a sacred place, is the place where the ticket seller finds a self-

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<sup>156</sup> My translation. The published English version translates this passage as 'a place these bejewelled, decorated figures would never reach (p. 7)', which seems to be a misplacement of a previous passage.

assertive morality, generating, with the help of Beethoven's biography, thoughts of modesty, sacrifice and charity.

As mentioned in Chapter Three, the question of the 'correct' performance timing generates much irony at the expense of the ticket seller, as he harshly criticises the conductor of the concert performance despite having missed most of the concert, and only in relation to the duration of the recording he owns. Further irony is produced as the ticket seller thinks the fugitive is an enthusiastic music aficionado, like 'gente que piensa; un intelectual, un compositor, tal vez (p. 13)' ['people who think, an intellectual, a composer, perhaps (p. 8)'], with 'largueza de gran señor (p. 14)' ['the largess of a great gentleman (p. 9)']. The reader, however, knows that this character did not come to the concert hall to hear the *Eroica* but to escape from his would-be assassins, and that he is of modest origins. Crucially, his comments after the first movement of the Symphony reveal to the reader that he has never attended a concert before:

[...] sólo yo he aplaudido; sólo yo; de todas partes me miran; [...] nunca he escuchado una orquesta de éstas, ni entiendo de músicas que se escuchan así (p. 23).

[...] I'm the only one who clapped; only me; all around me people are looking at me; [...] I've never listened to one of these orchestras, and I don't know anything about the music people listen to like this (pp. 15-16).

As in the passage above, in his article 'Un oyente de buena voluntad' (1952) Carpentier teases an inexperienced concert-goer listening to the *Eroica*, who claps between movements and makes comments that reveal his ignorance about music and concert conventions. More ridicule is poured on him when the wife tells him they are listening to another piece that has also a 'heroic' character and begins quietly:

Por vez primera el marido, con alguna curiosidad, mira lo que ocurre en el escenario. [...] - *Sinfonía Heroica* de Beethoven, dice el programa. Escuchemos... Bien. No está mal. Pero yo hubiera empezado más fuerte. Eso no es muy heroico. [...] Yo, más bien, hubiera usado trompetas, como en las bandas. Por cierto, ¿qué diferencia habrá entre una banda y una orquesta sinfónica? [...] ¡Pero se acabó!... Llegó el momento de aplaudir: ¡Bravo!... Pero... ¿por qué me miran todos, como enfurecidos? ¿Qué he hecho



yo, Dios mío? [...] ¿Te parece tan heroica esta *Sinfonía* de Beethoven? [La esposa] - ¡Están tocando la Quinta de Chaikovski!<sup>157</sup>

For the first time the husband, with some curiosity, looks at what is happening on stage. [...] - Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony, says the programme. Let's listen... Good. Not bad. But I'd have started louder. That's not very heroic. [...] I would have rather used trumpets, like in bands. By the way, what would be the difference between a band and a symphony orchestra? [...] But it's finished!... It's time to clap: Bravo!... But... why is everybody looking at me, as if they were furious? My God, what have I done? [...] Do you find this *Symphony* by Beethoven so heroic? [The wife] - They are playing Tchaikovsky's Fifth!

The fugitive of *El acoso* hardly pays attention to the *Eroica* at first, as he is preoccupied with controlling his extreme anxiety and staying unnoticed. As he pulls himself together, he begins to follow the music:

¡Oh! esos instrumentos que me golpean las entrañas, ahora que estoy mejor; aquel que pega sobre sus calderos, pegándome, cada vez, en medio del pecho; esos de arriba, que tanto suenan hacia mí, con esas voces que les salen de hoyos negros; esos violines que parecen aserrar las cuerdas, desgarrando, rechinando en mis nervios; esto crece, crece, haciéndome daño; suenan dos mazazos; otro más y gritaría (pp. 22-23).

Oh! those instruments beating against my guts, just when I was feeling better; that man pounding those kettle drums, pounding me, each time, right in the center of my chest; those up higher, who are playing so loud right towards me, with these sounds that come out of black holes; those violinists seeming to saw the strings, tearing, grating on my nerves; all this grows and grows, hurting me; two drumbeats; one more and I'd shout (p. 15).

Suddenly, the fugitive finds the music very familiar yet he cannot name it. It is the same music he sometimes mistook for 'el sordo ruido de la imprenta de tarjetas de visita (p. 67)' ['the muffled noise of the visiting-card printing shop (p. 50)'] during his confinement at the belvedere. Only after a prostitute (the woman with the fox stole) comments "'¡Qué bella es esta marcha fúnebre!' (p. 24)' ["How beautiful this funeral march is!'" (p. 16)'] does the fugitive realise what he is listening to, although he is unaware that this movement forms part of Beethoven's *Eroica*: 'Durante días he escuchado esta marcha fúnebre, sin saber que era una marcha fúnebre (p. 24)' ['For days and days I listened to this funeral march without knowing it was a funeral march

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<sup>157</sup> Alejo Carpentier, 'Un oyente de buena voluntad' (1952), in *Ese músico que llevo dentro 3. La música en Cuba*, Obras Completas, 16 vols (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1983-94), XII (1987), 21-23 (pp. 21-22).

(pp. 16-17)']. It is at the concert hall where he fully recognises the basic structure of the piece, as Anke Birkenmaier notes.<sup>158</sup> His discernment of the music remains rudimentary, as we can gather from his descriptions: 'algo grave, triste, lento (p. 23)' ['something serious, sad, slow (p. 16)'] followed by something 'como una danza; luego, la música a saltos, alegre (p. 27)' ['like a dance; then the hopping, happy music (p. 18)']. For him, all is a product of a vindictive God that 'se encarna en los instrumentos que me obligó a escuchar, esta noche, conducido por los truenos de su Ira (p. 25)' ['is incarnate in the instruments He makes me listen to, tonight, conducted by the thunder of His Rage (p. 17)']. His anthropological reflections on the religious reverence and rites observed by the other members of the audience convince him that he is attending a Christian Mass:

Comprendo ahora por qué los de la fila no miran sus programas; comprendo por qué no aplauden entre los trozos; se tienen que tocar en su orden, como en la misa se coloca el Evangelio antes del Credo, y el Credo antes del Ofertorio (p. 26).

I understand now why the people in my row don't look at their programs; I understand why they don't applaud between sections: the parts have to be played in their own order, the way in Mass the Gospel comes before the Credo, and the Credo before the Offertory (p. 18).

Several Carpentier scholars have rightly indicated that the funeral march anticipates the fugitive's death. (Interestingly, since the time of the *Eroica*'s premiere, music critics have generally associated the Symphony with death followed by rejuvenation, as Marc Evan Bonds notes.<sup>159</sup>) The idea that certain artistic works can foretell death has also strong roots in music criticism, particularly among scholars who subscribe to the concept of 'late style'. Take for instance Edward Said's views in his posthumous book *On Late Style* (2006):

Late style is *in*, but oddly *apart* from the present. [...] As Adorno said about Beethoven, late style does not admit the definitive cadences of death; instead, death appears in a

<sup>158</sup> Birkenmaier, *Alejo Carpentier y la cultura del surrealismo en América Latina*, p. 229.

<sup>159</sup> Marc Evan Bonds, 'Symphony, §II, 2: 19th century: Beethoven', in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. by Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell, 29 vols (London: Macmillan, 2001), XXIV, 835-36 (p. 836). For a comprehensive review of the reception history of the *Eroica*, see Thomas Sipe, *Beethoven: Eroica Symphony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 54-75.

refracted mode, as irony. But with the kind of opulent, fractured, and somehow inconsistent solemnity of a work such as the *Missa Solemnis*, or in Adorno's own essays, the irony is how often lateness as theme and as style keeps reminding us of death.<sup>160</sup>

Although 'late-style' works are usually thought to be retrospectively related to the deaths of their creators, they seem to have some other-worldly qualities that may be interesting to consider when discussing Carpentier's use of Beethoven. The *Missa solemnis*, seen by critics as Beethoven's personal testament and his major contribution to religious music, could have been a fitting means to illustrate the fugitive's relationship with divinity and death. As William Drabkin puts it, 'the *Missa solemnis* is usually made to bear the full weight of Beethoven's musical expression of religious beliefs. [...] [With it] he finally acknowledges the need to come to terms with God.'<sup>161</sup> Yet the *Eroica* Symphony, a milestone of Beethoven's 'heroic period', is evidently far more significant in terms of extra-musical significance, as Steven Boldy shows:

[...] the reader is also clearly invited to consider the relation between the model [represented by Rolland's biography and the recording] and the life of the *acosado*, especially by the constant use of the word *heroico* and variations on it in his context. The historical cycle of idealism and then corruption through power in Bonaparte is certainly relevant to the career of the *acosado*. [...] The difference in scale between the *acosado* and Napoleon, and the very relative initial heroism of the former, necessarily introduces a measure of irony into the use of the model.<sup>162</sup>

However, as the fugitive cannot identify the title of the Symphony, he remains unaware of the historical links with Bonaparte and the quintessentially secular principles that governed the French Revolution, and this is, in itself, a source of dramatic irony.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Edward W. Said, *On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2006), p. 24.

<sup>161</sup> William Drabkin, *Beethoven: Missa solemnis*, Cambridge Music Handbooks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 2. See also William Kinderman, 'Beethoven's Symbol for the Deity in the *Missa solemnis* and the Ninth Symphony', *19th Century Music*, 9 (1985), 102-18.

<sup>162</sup> Boldy, 'Making Sense in Carpentier's *El acoso*', p. 617.

<sup>163</sup> The *Eroica*'s connection with Bonaparte is also important from a musical perspective, as Thomas Sipe notes: 'The epic, battle-like opening movement, the borrowings from French revolutionary celebrations in the funeral march, the quotations of a soldier's song in the scherzo, and the allusion to the ballet *Die Geschöpfe des Prometheus* in the finale all have special "Napoleonic" significance.' Sipe, *Beethoven: Eroica Symphony*, p. ix.

The opening sentence of *El acoso*, which quotes Beethoven's dedication, makes the association with the *Eroica* absolutely explicit for the musically-informed reader. But one may become aware of the link between the novella and the Symphony even before reading the first page. As mentioned in Chapter Four, Carpentier's comments on the musical structure of *El acoso* outside the text itself have been seized on by publishers for promotional material printed on book covers. Additional publisher's notes and images prompt the reader to establish links with the *Eroica*. For instance, the Bruguera edition reproduces the opening bars of the score and promises that 'Nadie olvidará jamás este libro, esta Tercera Sinfonía de Ludwig van Beethoven – la "Heroica" – narrada en clave cubana' [nobody will ever forget this book, this Third Symphony by Ludwig van Beethoven – the *Eroica* – narrated in Cuban key], which suggests that the novella is a literary version of the Symphony.<sup>164</sup> The Alfaguara edition, in turn, refers to the notion of the 'correct' performance timing of the Symphony:

El vestíbulo de un teatro habanero, los cuarenta y seis minutos de duración de una ejecución correcta de la *Sinfonía Heroica* de Beethoven no son más que el punto de partida de una novela breve que pretende la totalidad.<sup>165</sup>

The foyer of a theatre in Havana, the forty-six minutes of a correct performance of the *Eroica* Symphony by Beethoven are no more than the starting point of a novella that seeks totality.

The juxtaposition of the various connotations that can be linked to the *Eroica* prompts the reader to a degree of scepticism about these layers of significance. The wide-ranging meanings that can be attached to *The Rite of Spring* and 'L'Internationale' play a similarly significant role in *La consagración de la primavera*, which I shall now discuss.

<sup>164</sup> Carpentier, *El acoso* (Barcelona, Bruguera, 1979), publisher's notes on book cover.

<sup>165</sup> Carpentier, *El acoso* (Madrid: Alfaguara, 1983), publisher's notes on book cover.

## **The militant *Rite***

The story of *La consagración* is set against some of the most significant historical events of the twentieth century, culminating with the failed U. S. invasion of the Bay of Pigs. Vera, the heroine, is a White Russian ballerina working for Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. Despite her anti-revolutionary views, she gets involved with a left-wing intellectual named Jean-Claude. Vera makes a trip to Spain to visit the Frenchman, who has enrolled as a militiaman with the International Brigades against Franco. There she meets Enrique, a bourgeois Cuban architect also fighting against Franco who later becomes her partner. After the death of Jean-Claude, Vera and Enrique flee war-devastated Europe to settle in Cuba, where she develops a social-artistic project involving the creation of a new choreography for Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* with Afro-Cuban dancers.

Vera first thinks about *The Rite* during her train journey to Spain through the Pyrenees. Her head whirls with thoughts about The Chosen One (in Stravinsky's ballet, the character that is sacrificed to the God of Spring in order to gain his benevolence) as she gets closer to the battlefield where Jean-Claude lies wounded. 'Lloraron todos... Y yo también tengo ganas de llorar, en este momento, rodeada ya de viajeros que despiertan' [they all cried ... And I also feel like weeping, at this moment, surrounded by awakening travellers], thinks Vera mournfully.<sup>166</sup> Once she recovers from the shock produced by the death of Jean-Claude, Vera returns to working life with renewed spirit, performing in a number of Diaghilev's productions. When the Ballets Russes begin rehearsing *The Rite* – 'cuya partitura se tocaba ya en todas partes, pero que, como ballet, seguía siendo una obra malograda (p. 307)' [whose score was already played

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<sup>166</sup> Alejo Carpentier, *La consagración de la primavera*, ed. by Julio Rodríguez Puértolas (Madrid: Editorial Castalia, 1998 [1978]), p. 97. Further references to this edition will be given in the main text. This novel is published in French as *La danse sacrée* and in German as *Le Sacre du printemps*. It is yet to be published in English. Translations given in this chapter are mine.

everywhere, but which, as a ballet, continued to be a failed work]<sup>167</sup> – The Chosen One returns to her mind, this time directly linked to her own traumatic experiences with political revolutions:

Y, al acercarme, marcando los pasos, a la Virgen Electa de hoy [...] no veía a *la que iba a morir*, sino a la que padecía su muerte en vida, que la asumía, la lloraba, la sollozaba, plañidera de sí misma, como yo asumía, lloraba, sollozaba, en las noches solitarias de mi hotel, mi desesperanza causada por una idea – la *Idea*, la eterna *Idea*, religiosa o política, unida siempre a la existencia de un sacrificio, *Idea* a la que estaba pagando el tributo de mí misma sin haberla aceptado jamás (p. 309).

And, when I was getting close, marking the steps, towards The Chosen One of today [...] I could not see *the one who was to die*, but the one who suffered her death in lifetime, who would embrace, cry, sob for it, a hired mourner of herself, as I would take on, cry, sob, during solitary nights in my hotel, my despair caused by an idea – the *Idea*, the eternal *Idea*, religious or political, always tied to the existence of a sacrifice, the *Idea* to which I was paying my own tribute without having ever accepted it.

Vera sees herself as the victim of an unjust fate to which she has not surrendered. Her sacrifice is not anchored in an ancient tribal world nor does it defy the dark forces of nature, but is an all-too-present destiny that threatens to continue till eternity. It is the power of her own imagination that liberates Vera from her sorrows:

Sigo marcando los pasos de la *Danse sacrale*, pero, al sonar el acorde final, extrañamente traído por una cromática de flautas, pienso que aquí podría empezar un segundo ballet, jamás escrito, y que acaso no se escriba nunca: los Dioses no se dan por satisfechos con el sacrificio. Piden más. [...] Y se olvidará el pasado sacrificio para organizar uno Nuevo, pues buenas razones habrá siempre en ello... E interrumpo mi divagación en torno a ese imaginario ballet, complemento del otro, que sería, en verdad, el ballet del nunca acabar, sintiéndome, una mañana, rebelde y dura, repentinamente liberada de la depresión y del agobio (pp. 309-11).

I continue marking the steps of the *Danse sacrale*, but after the final chord, bizarrely brought by the flutes' chromatic scale, I think about a second ballet which could begin here, one never written, and which perhaps never will be written: the Gods are not satisfied with the sacrifice. They ask for more. [...] And the past sacrifice will be forgotten [in order] to organise a New One, as there will always be good reasons to do so... And I interrupt my daydream about that imaginary ballet, complementary to the other one, which would be, really, the never-ending ballet, [while] feeling, one morning, rebellious and hard, suddenly liberated from depression and stress.

Once settled in Cuba, Vera is invited to witness a ritual Afro-Cuban ceremony taking place in a deprived area of Havana, which instantly revolutionises her artistic thought.

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<sup>167</sup> Here Vera seems to be a mouthpiece for Stravinsky, who preferred *The Rite* as a concert work and was unhappy with the original 1913 production. In an article published by *The Observer* on 3 July 1921, the composer highlighted that *The Rite* 'exists as a piece of music first and last'. Quoted in Peter Hill, *Stravinsky: The Rite of Spring* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 110.

She first thinks about staging *The Rite* with non-professional Afro-Cuban dancers, revealing a clichéd statement of racial prejudice towards blacks – that they have a ‘natural’ sense of rhythm reflecting their ‘primitive’ nature:

Aquí podría montarse una *Consagración de la primavera* con gente como la que acabamos de ver bailar. Con lo que llevan dentro, con su sentido del ritmo, habría poco que añadir. Entenderían muy pronto la rítmica de Stravinsky, y se vería una danza realmente sometida a pulsiones elementales, primordiales, bien distintas de las birrias coreográficas que hemos visto hasta ahora (p. 399).

Here *The Rite of Spring* could be staged, with people like the ones we have just seen dancing. With what they have inside, with their sense of rhythm, there would be little to add. They would quickly understand Stravinsky’s rhythms, and one would see a dance truly subject to elementary and primeval pulses, very different from the choreographic monstrosities we have seen so far.

Vera’s description of the Afro-Cubans’ dance finds parallel in Carpentier’s account of a show he witnessed at the Paris International Colonial Exposition (1931), in which a group of naked indigenous people danced to a

[...] ritmo obsesionante, elemental en su esencia, complejo en el conjunto; ritmo verdadero, nacido como las palmadas del hombre primitivo, de una necesidad interior del ser humano; ritmo arrollador, todopoderoso, capaz de hacernos caer en éxtasis; ritmo religioso, profundo, al lado del cual todos los ritmos inventados por nosotros parecen pobres caricaturas, urdidas por niños degenerados.<sup>168</sup>

[...] obsessive rhythm, fundamental in its essence, complex in the ensemble; true rhythm, born like the clapping of primitive man, out of an inner human need; overwhelming rhythm, all-powerful, able to make us fall in ecstasy; religious rhythm, profound, next to which all rhythms invented by us seem poor caricatures, warped by degenerate children.

Vera persuades the untrained dancers to take part in an experiment in her studio: to improvise to a recording of *The Rite of Spring*. Their ‘natural’ response to Stravinsky’s music prompts her to take on her long-dreamed project to create a new choreography for the ballet. Through *The Rite*, not only does she defy the apartheid-like social order of

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<sup>168</sup> Alejo Carpentier, ‘Segundo viaje a la Exposición Colonial’, in *Crónicas I*, Obras Completas Series, 16 vols (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1983-94), VIII (1985), 285-90 (pp. 286-87). Carpentier does not specify the provenance of the performers, yet he lists the musical instruments they play: kettledrums, gourds, *balafon* (a West African xylophone) and *gangarria* (a ‘Paleolithic’ instrument from Cuba, which is mentioned in ‘Los orígenes de la música’). This suggests the music incorporates elements of the African and indigenous cultures of Cuba. The authenticity of the indigenous component of this performance is questionable, as the historical canon has declared natives from Cuba (Taínos) to be extinct for several centuries.

pre-revolutionary Cuba by working with black dancers, but she also becomes sensitised to the economic inequalities and the harsh political climate of Fulgencio Batista's dictatorship.<sup>169</sup> During the 1950s, as the political atmosphere in Cuba thickens, Vera abandons her *Rite* project as she finds endless difficulties in realising it. The Cuban Revolution has a redeeming effect on Vera, who eventually accepts a historical fate 'cuyas ideas fundamentales coincidían con las de la grande y única Revolución de la época (p. 765)' [whose fundamental ideas coincided with those of the grand and only Revolution of the time]. After Enrique's brave participation in the Battle of the Bay of Pigs, Vera finds the inspiration to take up her *Rite* project again.

By associating *The Rite of Spring* with the heroine's ideological conversion, Carpentier gives Stravinsky's piece a new extra-musical meaning, that of revolutionary political impulses.

### **'L'Internationale': hatred and redemption, utopia and showcase**

Intertwined with Stravinsky's composition is 'L'Internationale', a militant anthem written by the French woodworker Eugène Pottier (1816-1887) during the Paris Commune, and set to music by the Belgian composer Pierre Degeyter (1848-1932). This song was adopted world-wide by communist, socialist, social democrat and anarchist movements, and became the official anthem of the Soviet Union until 1944. Commonly sung with the hand in a clenched fist, the song is a stirring call to build a new society, as the chorus tells:

C'est la lutte final:  
Groupons-nous, et demain,

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<sup>169</sup> Vera's social-artistic initiative bears certain resemblance to the dance project *Rhythm is it!* (2003), in which hundreds of children and teenagers coming from disadvantaged areas of Berlin danced to *The Rite* performed by the Berliner Philharmoniker under Simon Rattle. See Tobias Bleek, 'Making of the Project', in *Rhythm Is It* <[http://www.rhythmisit.com/en/php/index\\_flash.php?HM=2&SM=1&CM=2](http://www.rhythmisit.com/en/php/index_flash.php?HM=2&SM=1&CM=2)> [accessed 5 March 2009].



L'Internationale  
Sera le genre humain.<sup>170</sup>

Then comrades, come rally  
And the last fight let us face  
The International  
Unites the human race.<sup>171</sup>

For Vera, 'L'Internationale' is a shadow that follows her everywhere. As a young child, she hears it sung by Bolsheviks. She and her family escape the October Revolution to settle in France. There she hears the anthem sung by the dancers of Diaghilev's troupe and later by the supporters of the French Popular Front. When she visits Jean-Claude in Benicassim (eastern Spain), she hears 'L'Internationale' sung by the celebrity American black singer and actor Paul Robeson with the participation of a multitude of partisans in many languages. (Carpentier here presupposes an informed reader who knows not only that the real-life Robeson was the first major singer to perform African-American folk songs and spirituals on an international stage, but that he was overtly involved with the socialist cause and anti-colonialist movements, regularly performing for the poor and the oppressed.<sup>172</sup>) On hearing Robeson's performance, Vera feels

[...] arrastrada por el másculo ímpetu de un canto revolucionario cargado de historia. Y es la Historia, la que me lleva – pienso – ya que, por convicción profunda, por el trauma recibido en la infancia, rechazo – aborrezco – toda idea de revolución (p. 262).

[...] taken over by the masculine impetus of a revolutionary song loaded down with history. And it is History which leads me – I think – as, by profound conviction, because of the trauma undergone in childhood, I reject – I loath – any idea of revolution.

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<sup>170</sup> For the complete original French lyrics of 'L'Internationale', see Eugène Edmé Pottier, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Pierre Brochon (Paris: François Maspero, 1966), p. 101.

<sup>171</sup> Eugène Pottier and Pierre Degeyter, 'The International', in *The Workers' Song-Book* (London: The Workers' Theatre Movement, 1932), p. 1 (non-literal translation and melody). Audio versions of 'L'Internationale' in many languages are available in *Russian Anthems Museum*, ed. by Vadim Makarov <<http://www.hymn.ru/internationale/index-en.html>> [accessed 15 March 2009].

<sup>172</sup> During the Spanish Civil War, Robeson actively supported the International Brigades against Franco, performing in Benicassim and other locations. See Sheila Tully Boyle and Andrew Bunie, *Paul Robeson: The Years of Promise and Achievement* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), p. 383. For Robeson's music repertoire, see William Pencak, 'Paul Robeson and Classical Music', in *Paul Robeson: Essays on His Life and Legacy*, ed. by Joseph Dorinson and William Pencak (Jefferson: McFarland, 2002), pp. 152-59, and Kevin Jack Hagopian, "'You Know Who I Am!': Paul Robeson's Ballad for Americans and the Paradox of the Double V in American Popular Front Culture' (see Pencak, above), pp. 167-79. For Robeson's political activities, see Philip S. Foner, ed., *Paul Robeson Speaks: Writings, Speeches, Interviews 1918-1974* (London: Quartet Books, 1978).

When a partisan asks her whether she is moved by 'L'Internationale', she coldly replies: 'Bueno: los himnos siempre son impresionantes. Vienen con su carga de emoción colectiva [Well, anthems are always impressive. They come with their load of collective emotion]', and adds with derision: 'a mí me emociona muchísimo *Dios salve al Zar* (p. 269)' [I am very moved by *God Save the Tsar*]. Despite her ideological reservations about 'L'Internationale', Vera is deeply impressed by the powerful and mystical artistry of Robeson, seeing this in terms of a Kantian sublime:<sup>173</sup>

[...] en el gigante Paul Robeson hallaba yo otra fuerza de convencimiento, totalmente independiente de las palabras que acarrea: fuerza del arte, de la elocuencia trascendida, magnificada, universal y sin tiempo (p. 259).

[...] in the giant Paul Robeson I found a different power, that of firm belief, totally independent of the words that he was conveying: the power of art, of transcendent eloquence, magnificent, universal and timeless.

In Robeson, Vera finds the overwhelming charisma and inspiration which she once admired in the acclaimed Russian ballerina Anna Pávlova, her all-time model. She fantasises about the two artists dancing and acting a scene from Shakespeare's *Othello*:

Un imposible, exótico *pas de deux*, contrastado hasta el absurdo, aunque armonioso a pesar de todo, se concertaba en mi imaginación, entre el gigante negro que aquí veía y el etéreo cisne mallarmeano que habitaba mi recuerdo, y más ahora que el nieto de esclavos, a pedido de oyentes ingleses y yankis [sic], deseosos de escucharlo en una breve acción dramática, se dirigía a la invisible blancura de Desdémona – Desdémona, cisne agónico, identificado con Anna bailando su propia muerte – en el monólogo cimero de la tragedia shakesperiana:

*It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul;  
Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars!  
It is the cause. Yet I'll not shed her blood,  
Not scar that whiter skin of hers than snow,  
And smooth as monumental alabaster.  
Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men* (p. 259).

An impossible, exotic *pas de deux*, absurdly incongruous, but harmonious nevertheless, realised in my imagination, between the black giant whom I saw here, and the ethereal Mallarmesque swan that lived in my memory, and even more now that the grandson of slaves, at the request of English and Yankee listeners who were eager to hear him in a brief dramatic action, addressed the invisible whiteness of Desdemona – dying swan, identified with Anna dancing her own death – in the topmost monologue of the Shakespearean tragedy:

[...]

<sup>173</sup> For Kant, true judgments concerning the beautiful and the sublime are disinterested, universal, necessary and without a purpose. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. by James Creed Meredith, ed. by Nicholas Walker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007 [1790]), pp. 35-164.

(As an actor, the real-life Robeson excelled in the title role of *Othello* and in the musical *Show Boat*. The real-life Pávlova's most famous role was the Dying Swan, subject of innumerable postcards. She became a renowned figure while working for the Imperial Russian Ballets, before she escaped the Bolshevik Revolution. Despite her association with Diaghilev's groundbreaking Ballets Russes, Pávlova danced mainly to a conventional classical and romantic musical repertoire – allegedly she turned down the lead role in Stravinsky's *Firebird* because she thought the music was too complicated. Carpentier's ideal reader might recognise that Pávlova's artistic interests, her relations with audiences and her political consciousness were very different from Robeson's.<sup>174</sup>)

The lines from *Othello* recalled by Vera, recited by Robeson in the particular context of the anti-fascist struggle, appear to point to political commitment and sacrifice rather than conveying the themes of love and jealousy of the original play. One may suggest that this scene signals the moment when the heroine begins to question her own conservative political views. The lines from the play may also be linked to the fundamental notion of the sacrifice to the collective in Stravinsky's original *Rite of Spring*. Years later, Vera's own reinterpretation of *The Rite* with Afro-Cuban dancers plays a key part in her ideological transformation, from staunch anti-revolutionary to supporter of the Cuban Revolution. As a consequence of her radical changes, Pávlova falls from her imaginary pedestal:

Y hoy miraba ese retrato [de Pávlova] una vez más, dándome cuenta de que un cambio se había operado en mí de la noche a la mañana en la manera de contemplarlo. [...] Pensaba de repente que ella, la Incomparable, habría detestado el espectáculo [*La consagración* de Vera] que, tras de un esfuerzo de años, iba a presentar al mundo (p. 574).

And today I would look at that portrait [Pávlova's] once again, realising that a change in the way of contemplating it had occurred in me overnight. [...] I suddenly thought that

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<sup>174</sup> For an examination of Robeson's acting career, see Martin Bauml Duberman, *Paul Robeson* (London: The Bodley Head, 1989), pp. 109-55, 263-79. See the authoritative biography of Pávlova, Keith Money, *Anna Pavlova: Her Life and Art* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982). A comprehensive list of Pávlova's repertoire and pictures as the Dying Swan are found in John and Roberta Lazzarini, *Pavlova: Repertoire of a Legend* (New York: Schirmer; London: Macmillan, 1980). Some of Pávlova's most famous photos can be seen online on <<http://www.diary.ru/~oldpostcards/p57435620.htm>>.

she, the Incomparable, would have hated the show [Vera's *Rite*] that, after years of effort, I was to present to the world.

Subsequently, following Enrique's revelation of sexual betrayal, a heart-broken Vera flees to the most isolated corner of Cuba, where she plans to lead an eventless life. She is unaware that the country is on the brink of a socialist revolution, naively thinking that there, 'L'Internationale', '*para decir la verdad, no se había oído nunca* (p. 651)' [*in truth, had never been heard*]. She soon hears the anthem sung by supporters of the Cuban Revolution, which she will eventually embrace.

'L'Internationale' is of key significance to the hero's story. On his journey to the Spanish battlefield, Enrique first comes across 'L'Internationale' in the hustle and bustle of a train station:

[...] enorme, multitudinaria, tremebunda, en andenes repletos de gente, y en los vagones que ya empiezan a rodar suena, solemne, sobrecogedora, *La Internacional* – tal *Magnificat* cantado en nave de altas bóvedas, sobre el *organum* de la locomotora que, con un largo silbido, toma el rumbo de los Pirineos (p. 226).

[...] 'L'Internationale', enormous, multitudinous, terrifying, from platforms full of people, and in the wagons which now begin to roll, sounding solemn, overwhelming – like a *Magnificat* sung in a high-vaulted nave, on the *organum* of the locomotive that, with a long whistle, sets off for the Pyrenees.

Like Vera, Enrique attends Robeson's concert in Benicassim and is particularly touched by his performance of 'L'Internationale'. This experience will have important repercussions after he leaves Europe. Once settled back in Cuba, Enrique travels to the U. S. to buy architecture publications and music scores for Vera, who has become his wife. In New York City, he meets up with his frivolous cousin Teresa and takes her to a restaurant frequented by members of the American avant-garde. Enrique shows some frustration when his cousin, on hearing Edgard Varèse at work next door, questions whether his music – 'bramidos jadeantes, espasmódicos, de un enorme aunque inidentificable animal herido (p. 418)' [panting and spasmodic roaring from an enormous though unidentifiable wounded animal] – has any artistic value at all.

Varèse's music is still in the background at the point when Teresa decides to drag Enrique to the Rainbow Room, a luxurious cabaret frequented by the jet set. He greatly enjoys the vaudevillian combination of song, dance, magic tricks and stripping. Yet his mood changes dramatically at the end of the show, as he tells us how

[...] la orquesta, con cierta solemnidad, empezó a tocar una música que me era sumamente conocida, tremendamente conocida, dramáticamente conocida. Pero, no. No podía ser. ¿Aquí? ¿En el Rainbow Room? Había bebido algo, y la mezcla de vino y whisky [sic] era muy poco recomendable. Debo haberme equivocado de música. Debe ser algo de Tchaikovski (acaso ese *scherzo* marcial de la *Patética...*), o, tal vez, de Wagner (no recuerdo bien, en este momento, la marcha de *Tannhäuser...*) [...]. Pero no, no, no, no. No hay dudas ahora. No hay dudas. Y entran veinticuatro *girls*, todas iguales en pinta y estatura, cortadas por el mismo patrón, llevando bonetes de armiño, casacas rojas, faldas listadas de rojo, botas rojas, y empiezan a bailar simétricamente, de modo casi militar: vuelta a la pista, división en dos filas, cruce de grupos, figuras de geométrica ordenación – y vuelta a la pista, re-división en dos filas, re-cruce de grupos, re-figuras, y más vueltas y revueltas, marcando el paso, hasta un despliegue y alienación final. Y levantan el puño izquierdo... Y el público de ricos, de adinerados, de estrellas de cine [...], el todo Broadway del *show-business*, de la publicidad, de los negocios, la gente del patronato y de las relaciones públicas, que aquí se ha congregado esta noche, aplaude, aplaude, aplaude, interminablemente. Y el director de orquesta que hace una seña a sus músicos. *Bis. Bis. Bis.* Y vuelve a escucharse lo de antes. Y ya no hay duda posible. Es *eso* (pp. 420-21).

[...] the orchestra, with a certain solemnity, began to play a piece which to me was extremely familiar, tremendously familiar, dramatically familiar. But, no. It couldn't be. Here? In the Rainbow Room? I had drunk something, and mixing wine and whisky had been a bad idea. I must have got the wrong music. It must be something by Tchaikovsky (maybe that martial Scherzo in the *Pathétique...*), or, perhaps, I don't know, something by Wagner (I can't quite recall that march from *Tannhäuser* right now...) [...]. But no, no, no, no! There are no doubts now. There are no doubts. And twenty-four girls enter, all of the same look and height, cast in the same mould, wearing ermine hats, red jackets, red-striped skirts, red boots, and begin dancing symmetrically, in an almost military manner: back to the dance floor, dividing into two rows, groups crossing, geometrical figures – then they line up again, divide into two rows again, the groups cross back again, they make more geometrical figures, then they turn again and again, marking time, before a final deployment and line-up. And they raise the left fist... And the audience of the rich, of the wealthy, of film stars [...], the whole of show-business Broadway, of advertising, of trade, the members of Boards of Directors and PR heads, who have gathered here tonight, they clap, clap, clap, endlessly. And the conductor makes a sign to his musicians. *Bis. Bis. Bis.* And so they play it again. And there is no possible doubt. It is *that*.

Enrique's account of the piece he knows so well yet cannot name conveys obvious dramatic irony, as the reader quickly realises that *that* is 'L'Internationale'. He first thinks of Wagner's and Tchaikovsky's marches, which are of undoubted musical similarity and share with 'L'Internationale' a vital, majestic and triumphant character.

The audience of the cabaret, which Enrique perceives as ideologically despicable, reminds him of the uses of these composers by certain non-socialist societies: Wagner by the Third Reich and Tchaikovsky by the Russia of the Tsars.<sup>175</sup>

When Enrique finally recognises 'L'Internationale', he experiences a dreadful ideological dissonance as he hears it in the most distant and inappropriate context he can imagine for it. The perversely trivialised cabaret version violently clashes with his memories of the impetuous combatants singing along with Robeson. The dancing-girls are fake protesters who do not incite their audience to arise nor to build a new socialist society. Instead of addressing hungry workers, the girls amuse the rich, achieving a disturbing subversion of the original utopian message of the song. The anthem's rebellious lyrics are not sung, but the performance tradition of raising the left fist is incorporated in the coercive choreography of the girls which evokes totalitarianism.<sup>176</sup>

The play on utopia and capitalism in this scene recalls Bertolt Brecht's satirical treatment of political themes, particularly in the final scene of *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* (1927-29), co-written with Kurt Weill. This opera is about an amusement town called Mahagonny, where money alone rules. The town is founded to provide satisfaction and pleasure to people, and is finally destroyed by those same desires. In the end, while the city perishes in flames, the characters march carrying placards with inscriptions such as 'For The Prolongation Of The Golden Age', 'For Property', 'For The Buying And Selling Of Love', 'For Freedom For The Rich' and

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<sup>175</sup> Throughout *La consagración de la primavera*, the music of Wagner and Tchaikovsky is associated with negative events and political attitudes. Wagner's operas are linked to fascism, for instance in the discussion of American opera productions during the Second World War (pp. 418-19). Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture* signals anti-revolutionary attitudes (pp. 269, 653), and his Fifth Symphony is the background against which Vera learns about the death of Jean-Claude (p. 305).

<sup>176</sup> The incongruous message produced by the cabaret performance may find a contemporary parallel in the rap version of Richard Makela (b. 1975), Monsieur R, 'L'Internationale', in *Russian Anthems Museum* <[http://media.vad1.com/temporary\\_url\\_20070929kldcg/internationale\\_2007-fr-monsieur\\_r\\_2007.mp3](http://media.vad1.com/temporary_url_20070929kldcg/internationale_2007-fr-monsieur_r_2007.mp3)> [accessed 15 March 2009]. Here, all stanzas are declaimed over a typical rap rhythmic backing, and the refrain is sung by the chorus girls in a hilariously sensual manner. As a result, the original militant character of the song is washed out. More generally, the genre of rap, which has become a thriving multi-million industry in the last decades, is easier to identify with commercial attitudes than with revolutionary ideals.

‘For Brute Stupidity’.<sup>177</sup> Carpentier, in the satire on the travesties of capitalism in the Rainbow Room scene, seems to reverse Brecht’s concept of defamiliarisation (*Verfremdung*) as he does not cause alienation but hilarity.<sup>178</sup>

Enrique is so altered by the misuse of ‘L’Internationale’ that he needs to leave the cabaret, dragging Teresa with him. On their way to their hotel, they have a sharp ideological disagreement over the song:

“¿Sabes lo que acaba de tocarse aquí? ¡*La Internacional!*” – “¿Y qué? – “*La Internacional* de Degeyter; la que nos cantó Paul Robeson en Benicassim; la que fue coreada, en veinte idiomas, por los combatientes de las Brigadas Internacionales”. – “¿Y qué? – “*La Internacional*. El título lo dice todo”. – “¿Y qué?” – “Que eso, carajo, no es para que se baile en un cabaret. Jamás creí que vería semejante cosa. Es que, de sólo pensarlo, se me revuelve la sangre”. – “Pues, a mí me parece muy bien. Tú sabes que, tarde o temprano, los ricos tendremos que jodernos. Por lo tanto, más vale que uno se vaya acostumbrando a oír *La Internacional*”. – “Pero no así. Y menos, en el Rainbow Room. Hay, en todo esto, una frivolidad, una novelería, que me indignan. Además, veo un mal agüero en ello: quienes con tanta ligereza aceptan lo que ayer aborrecieron, serán los primeros en renegar, mañana, de lo que hoy aplauden. *La Internacional* no se hizo para ellos”... Rodábamos ya en un taxi, hacia el hotel: “Para saber lo que significa *La Internacional* es necesario haber conocido el hambre, la explotación, la miseria, el desempleo” (pp. 421-22).

“Do you know what has just been played here? ‘L’Internationale’!” – “So what? – “‘L’Internationale’ by Degeyter; the one that Paul Robeson sung for us in Benicassim; the one that was chanted, in twenty languages, by the combatants of the International Brigades”. – “So what?” – “‘L’Internationale’. The title says everything”. – “So what?” – “That, damn it, can’t be sung in a cabaret. I never believed that I’d see such a thing. Just thinking about it makes my blood boil”. – “But it seems OK to me. You know that, sooner or later, we – the rich – will get screwed. So it’s better if we get used to hearing ‘L’Internationale’”. – “But not like this. And especially not in the Rainbow Room. Also, I see a bad omen in this: those who so easily accept what they loathed yesterday, will be the first ones to renounce, tomorrow, what they applaud today. ‘L’Internationale’ was not made for them”... We were speeding in a taxi, to the hotel:

<sup>177</sup> Bertolt Brecht, *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, trans. by W. H. Auden and Chester Kallman, ed. by John Willett and Ralph Manheim, Collected Plays Series, 8 vols (London: Eyre Methuen, 1997), IIiii, 1-65 (pp. 63-65). The premiere of *Mahagonny* in Leipzig took place in a climate of hostility, exacerbated by the audience’s outraged response and the intervention of the police. Ronald Sanders recounts: ‘The Nazis had undoubtedly helped to create this atmosphere; indeed, it is possible that they had even bought blocks of seats to plant themselves among the spectators and help stir up the demonstration that finally broke out during the finale’. Ronald Sanders, *The Days Grow Short: The Life and Music of Kurt Weill* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1980), p. 149.

<sup>178</sup> According to Brecht, contradictory social reality should be portrayed in a shockingly unnatural manner in order to alienate the viewer. He called his work ‘socialist realist’ despite his experimental political aesthetics diverging from the homonymous Soviet doctrine, which aimed to represent the socialist struggle in a positive way according to canonical models. For an analysis of Brecht’s theories, see Meg Mumford, *Bertolt Brecht* (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 48-90. For a study of Soviet literature, see Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, 3rd edn (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000 [1981]). Vicky Unruh, in her article ‘The Performing Spectator in Alejo Carpentier’s Fictional World’ (1988), touches upon Carpentier’s interest in Brecht’s experiments with performance space and audience-stage relationships but does not analyse his views on theatrical depictions of social reality.

“To know what ‘L’Internationale’ means you have to have known hunger, exploitation, misery, unemployment”.

In her black-humour response to Enrique’s objection to the cabaret ‘L’Internationale’, Teresa is suggesting that the revolutionaries will usurp the power of the rich ruling class. Obviously, the rich cannot get used to ‘L’Internationale’ because their privileged status is in contradiction with the ideological content and purpose of the song.

Following Enrique’s diatribe against the capitalist audience of the cabaret, Teresa calls his bluff and dares him to demonstrate his commitment to the socialist utopia:

– “Pues, yo no creo que tú hayas conocido muchas hambres y muchas miserias en tu vida. Cantaste *La Internacional* en España, pero me parece que hace tiempo que ya no la cantas”. – “Por eso es que no soy nada. Ni burgués ni proletario. Ni chicha ni limonada, como se dice”. [...] “¿Te sigue la rabia?” – “No puedo remediarlo”. – “Vimos el *show* de las doce. Lo repetirán a las dos, con la misma *Internacional* en fin de espectáculo. Todavía tienes tiempo”. – “¿De qué?” – “De ir allá, a tirar una bomba. Volaría el Rainbow Room entero, y sería una magnífica apoteosis, con fuegos artificiales y todo”. – “Yo no soy terrorista, no tengo bombas, ni las tiraría si las tuviese. Nada se consigue con tirar bombas”. Teresa, con gesto desenfadado, se quitó los zapatos: “Bueno. Ya que no quieres volar el Rainbow Room, acuéstate conmigo” (p. 422).

– “But I don’t believe that you have known much in the way of hunger and misery in your life. You sang ‘L’Internationale’ in Spain, but it seems to me that you haven’t sung it for a long time”. – “That’s why I am nothing. Neither bourgeois nor proletarian. Neither fish nor fowl”. [...] “Are you still angry?” – “I can’t help it”. “We saw the twelve o’clock show. They will repeat it at two, with the same ‘L’Internationale’ at the end. You still have time”. – “For what?” – “To go there, to throw a bomb. It would blow up the whole Rainbow Room, and it would be a magnificent apotheosis, with fireworks and everything”. – “I’m not a terrorist, I don’t have bombs, nor would I throw them if I had them. Nothing is achieved by throwing bombs”. Teresa, with an uninhibited gesture, took her shoes off: “Good. As you don’t want to blow up the Rainbow Room, come to bed with me”.

Unable to show his heroism to Teresa and reconcile his ideological frustrations, Enrique resigns himself to making love to her, marking the beginning of an affair of a quasi-incestuous nature which will last many years. (Wagner having been already invoked in Enrique’s erroneous musings on the cabaret performance, the cousins’ relationship brings to mind his *Ring* cycle. These operas feature various adulterous and incestuous lovers including Wotan’s illegitimate children Siegmund and Sieglinde, whose offspring Siegfried loves Brünnhilde, the banished Valkyrie and Wotan’s daughter. The



association with incest in the novel may appear as a critique of the decadence of capitalism.)

For Enrique, being immersed in the luxurious world of the Rainbow Room – ‘la más millonaria atmósfera que yo hubiese respirado nunca (p. 420)’ [the most affluent atmosphere I had ever breathed in] – does not seem to pose a problem at first. After the politically-twisted performance of ‘L’Internationale’, that same space turns knotty, reflecting his own ideological conflicts. Teresa, light-hearted, perceives and reacts to the anthem very differently. She exploits the irony conveyed by the performance in a particularly close-to-the-bone manner, unmasking the contradictions between her cousin’s upper-class background and his revolutionary raptures, preaching and actions. Naturally, Enrique does not accept her defiant suggestion that he return to the dance hall to destroy it, and feels pushed into admitting the uselessness of his political endeavours: ‘nada resulta tan irritante como la acertada visión ajena de una molesta evidencia (p. 424)’ [nothing is more annoying than another’s correct apprehension of unwelcome evidence].

Immediately following the triumph of the Cuban Revolution, the cousins meet up at the mansion of their aristocratic aunt, who has just left for Miami. Teresa persuades her lover to try out their aunt’s bed, a ‘lecho impoluto’ [unpolluted bed] where for many years ‘jamás un hombre se acostó con ella (p. 716)’ [no man ever slept with her]. The cousins’ affair, triggered by their disagreement over the Rainbow Room ‘L’Internationale’, is ‘consecrated’ in the bed of their anti-revolutionary aunt.

While Teresa undresses, she asks, “Oye... ¿Wagner no compuso algo que se titula *La consagración de la casa*?” – Fue Beethoven. Esta noche lo enredas todo” (p. 717)’ [“Listen... Didn’t Wagner compose something called *The Consecration of the House*” – “That was Beethoven. You’re mixing everything up tonight”]. The original Spanish title of the novel, *La consagración de la primavera*, allows the confusion with

Beethoven's little-known overture *Die Weihe des Hauses* (1822, *The Consecration of the House*) and also preserves the religious connotations of the original title of Stravinsky's work, which is translated into Spanish as *La consagración de la primavera*. Teresa thinks of a very respectable piece by Beethoven but incorrectly attributes it to Wagner, whose works contain several pairs of illicit lovers. Enrique shows an impressive erudition when remembering the correct title of Beethoven's obscure overture, which contrasts with his mistaking of 'L'Internationale' for Wagner and Tchaikovsky during the cabaret show when the performance context impacts so strongly on what his ears can tell him. Now, although he can correctly attribute *The Consecration of the House* to Beethoven, Enrique does not notice that the title of the overture suggests Stravinsky's ballet about the ritual killing of a sacrificial virgin, even though his wife Vera has been working on this piece for many years.

The play on 'L'Internationale's words and music, performers, audiences and socio-political contexts produces many situations of irony in relation to events inside and outside the novel. Together with *The Rite of Spring*, 'L'Internationale' is used as a means to discuss the themes of ideological commitment, the battle against capitalism and the possibility of moral change.

## VI. Conclusions and avenues for future research

My examination of the role of music in Carpentier's writings demonstrates that a level of musicological competence is indispensable for an in-depth interdisciplinary study of this kind. Knowledge of music and the impetus to unpick the thematic associations of musical and wider cultural allusions has been vital to my understanding of the vast array of concrete musical references in Carpentier's works. The copious discussions of primeval music in *Los pasos perdidos* motivated me to investigate a wide range of theories on the origins and development of music, and Carpentier's non-fictional writings on the subject. Among these, 'Los orígenes de la música y la música primitiva' became crucial to my own interpretation of the novel. Intriguing musical references in *El acoso* and *La consagración de la primavera* inspired me to study other writings and radio programmes of Carpentier, texts of musical analysis, scores and recordings, among other sources. As Frédérique Arroyas puts it,

When a reader perceives the presence of music in a text or when readers take authors to task when they suggest that their work is influenced by music, it is also in the reader's mind that we must look for an ontology of music, not only in the text. It is then that we can say that the text's virtual musicality becomes reality.<sup>179</sup>

In Chapter Two, I framed 'Los orígenes de la música' in the context of evolutionary theory, drawing on the work of Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer, Richard Wallaschek, Erich von Hornbostel, Curt Sachs, Carlos Vega and Fernando Ortiz, among other thinkers. I also contextualised Carpentier's ideas within methodology developments in musicological and ethnological research occurring around the time of the writing of his text, referring to the ideas proposed by Jaap Kunst and Claude Lévi-Strauss.

My analysis of 'Los orígenes de la música' shows that Carpentier assimilates, resists and challenges a number of evolutionary ideas on the origin and development of

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<sup>179</sup> Arroyas, 'When Is a Text Like Music?', p. 98.

music. Crucially, the author incorporates paradigms of cultural evolution and the analogy between prehistoric humanity and current-day 'primitives', which he applies to his discussions of musical instruments. Although he mentions his readings of *The Origin of the Species* in a number of articles and letters, in his discussions of primeval music he does not refer explicitly to music theories by Darwin, Spencer and other evolutionists. It is likely that Carpentier acquired knowledge of these ideas via comparative musicology, which was based on evolutionary models. In his discussions of the origins of humankind and twentieth-century musical works in his articles 'El hombre anterior al hombre' and 'A Feeling for Music', he also draws on the work of the palaeontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who based his own evolutionary theory on Darwin's ideas.

Carpentier's central argument on the origins of music in 'Los orígenes de la música' (and that of his protagonist in *Los pasos perdidos*) coincides with that of Richard Wallaschek, who drew substantially on the music theories of Spencer and Darwin. Both Wallaschek and Carpentier propose that speech and music originated simultaneously, seek the emergence of music in rhythmic instinct and oppose the explanation of the courtship function of ancestral music.

Carpentier's mention of Wagner's music as the diametrical opposite of prehistoric musical expression suggests an evolutionary view of music history. His equating of prehistoric men with monkeys reveals a stereotyped reading of Darwinism. He presents 'primitives' as child-like and assumes uniformity in their cultures.

Carpentier frames his discussion of Cuban musical instruments in the context of the classification scheme of von Hornbostel and Sachs. In tune with the notions of comparative musicology, he stresses the potential of so-called primitive music for Western (European) scholars and composers, promoting Cuba as the ideal site for archaeological research on musical instruments.

Carpentier also makes use of ideas put forward by a number of early twentieth-century thinkers on 'primitive' culture who did not have a direct relationship with the school of comparative musicology. Among these is the proposal of Jules Combarieu that primeval music has a religious and magical nature, and the suggestion of psychoanalysts René Allendy and René Laforgue that primeval language is symbolic.

A number of quasi-scientific ideas appear to be Carpentier's original contributions, for instance the proposal that the only musical instrument used by prehistoric man for millennia was his own hands, and that the repetition of musical patterns in prehistoric music accounts for the origin of Western musical forms such as rondo and scherzo.

Carpentier highlights the rhythmic nature of so-called primitive music, which he explains by means of Oswald Spengler's (manipulated) notion of the Faustian. In his appraisal of the use by contemporary composers of the rhythmic principles found in this music, Carpentier pays particular attention to Darius Milhaud's compositions, including their collaborative piece *Incantations*.

In Chapter Three, I examined *Los pasos perdidos* in the light of 'Los orígenes de la música'. Given the similarity of the arguments about primeval music in these two texts, it seems highly likely that 'Los orígenes de la música' elaborates ideas which were later to become the groundwork for the discussions of music narrated in the novel.

Like Carpentier in 'Los orígenes de la música', the protagonist of *Los pasos perdidos* adheres to the essential concepts and methodologies of comparative musicology, hailing some of the most influential scholars but also pointing to the gaps in their knowledge of existing Latin American 'primitive' musical instruments. The enterprise of collecting rare instruments for the Museum of Organology is crucial for the protagonist's process of self-discovery. His initial reluctance to accept the Curator's

assignment, his reasoning for and against acquiring fake instruments, his excitement and subsequent detachment from his trophy, are all part of his search for authenticity.

The protagonist seems very convincing in his critical assessment of previous theories on music's origins and development. The shaman's ritual chant, seen as the most authentic form of musical expression, provides him with the definitive evidence for his own argument on the emergence of music and the inspiration for his long-dreamed-of, yet unachievable, compositional project.

Carpentier's experience of conducting in-situ research in Haiti appears highly relevant to the discussions of ethnological methods in *Los pasos perdidos*. As a mouthpiece for the author, the protagonist emphasises the need for first-hand experience and professionalism when studying non-Western cultures, which shows him as a forward-looking researcher despite his allegiance to nineteenth-century views of 'the primitive'. These methodological concerns are symptomatic of the fundamental reforms in ethnomusicological research that would occur during the 1950s, which saw the abandonment of comparative approaches, the firm establishment of scientific methods and the reformulation of the relation between the researcher and the object of study, among other advances.

The paradox of parallel temporalities derived from the nineteenth-century equation of prehistoric humankind with contemporary 'primitives' offers Carpentier the possibility to play with conflictive models of time in the novel, as he relates the emergence of music to both the Bible's Book of Genesis and the Palaeolithic era. The effect of Carpentier's juxtaposition of theological and evolutionary time is highly ironic, even if his biblical frame is viewed in a metaphorical sense.

In Chapter Four, I explored Carpentier's play on time and musical form in *El acoso*. I identified Carpentier's 1965 radio programme 'Las novelas *El acoso* y *El siglo de las luces*' as the most reliable and detailed source for the analysis of structural

analogies to music. In this radio account, Carpentier parallels *El acoso*'s action to the timeframe of Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony performed at a concert hall. One may argue that the conception of the novella was guided by the principles of the unities of time, place and action formulated after Aristotle's ideas on tragedy. Moreover, Carpentier exploits the ironic notion of a 'correctly' timed realisation of musical and literary works. It seems highly likely that the idea of a precise timeframe – which is also crucial to the ticket seller's story – originated in the author's work in radio broadcasting and music synchronisation. It may also be that the notion of the 'correct' timing relates to Erich Kleiber's 1950 recording of the *Eroica* and was conceived as an irony at the expense of this conductor, who was noted for being particularly punctilious.

Carpentier deliberately directs readers to literary parallels with sonata form, using puns that refer more to general rather than exact meanings of musical concepts. The organisation of the novella's themes and the absence of features comparable with a sonata-form development section reveal that *El acoso* has a loose relation with typical examples of this musical form. Calvin Brown has observed similar literary experiments with sonata form carried out by Todhunter, Plattensteiner and Cadilhac, which turned into straitjacketing exercises:

Whether the short poem, the long poem, the novel, or the drama is chosen as the medium, certain very general analogies can be worked out easily. But they are so general that they involve only processes which have been independently established in literature already. And as soon as the author tries to go beyond these elements which the two arts have in common – as soon as he tries to make a literary form which shall parallel the musical pattern with any exactness – he becomes inextricably entangled. When this point is reached, he may do any one of three things. He may simply abandon the attempt at parallelism with music, and go off on his own tack as a writer. This is the solution of Grace Hazard Conkling and Sidney Lanier. He may try to stay with the musical form, but be forced so to adapt it that it becomes almost unrecognizable, as do Todhunter and Plattensteiner. Finally, he may carry the parallelism as far as his medium will allow, and then try, by means entirely outside of his work – like Cadilhac's manifesto – to improve the parallelism by forcing analogies where none really exist.<sup>180</sup>

As in the parallels with musical form and time in *El acoso*, in the scenes depicting music performances Carpentier relies on the reader's sensitivity to and knowledge of

<sup>180</sup> Brown, *Music and Literature: A Comparison of the Arts*, p. 176.

music, particularly in relation to existing composers, performers and musical pieces, including their extra-musical connotations. These are relevant in musical allusions conveying irony, as my examination of *El acoso* and *La consagración de la primavera* in Chapter Five showed.

In *El acoso*, the live and recorded performances of Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony generate various layers of irony. This piece, which represented freedom to its composer, produces contextual irony as it becomes the accompaniment to the fugitive's confinement and also a temporary hope of escape when he hears it at the concert hall. This turns out to be only a reprieve of his execution for the 'correct' time it takes to play it. There is a dramatic irony in the fugitive's ignorance of the ideological connotations attached to the *Eroica* and their relevance to his own anti-heroic story. There is also humour in his total ignorance of concert conventions and rudimentary commentaries on the music, which are very much influenced by the actions and comments of other members of the audience. There is dramatic irony in the ticket seller mistaking the fugitive for an intellectual, knowledgeable in music. More irony is created at the expense of the ticket seller, who judges the live version of the *Eroica* only in relation to the 'correct' duration of the recording he owns and despite having missed most of the concert.

The Rainbow Room scene of *La consagración de la primavera* conveys many levels of irony too. There is dramatic irony in the hero's mistaken identification of the militant song 'L'Internationale' with Wagner and Tchaikovsky, which derives from the music as it is being divorced from the words. The musically-informed reader can appreciate the undoubted musical similarity between the socialist anthem and the marches by Wagner and Tchaikovsky, and also the clash between the revolutionary message of the song and the ideologies associated with the former composers. There is a level of situational irony, where the anthem is used as a showpiece in a nightclub, which



embarrasses and angers Enrique. Another level of irony, shared by the hero and the reader, is the clash between Paul Robeson's idealistic performance of 'L'Internationale' earlier in the novel and the commodified version of the same music in the cabaret. The conflict between revolutionary ideals and commercial entertainment produced by the cabaret version of 'L'Internationale' results in an unexpected ironic outcome: Enrique falling for his capitalist cousin Teresa. Their sexual relationship is reminiscent of Wagner's incestuous characters and may be interpreted as a critique of the travesties of capitalism. There is further irony in Teresa confusing titles of musical works by Wagner and Beethoven, and in Enrique missing the religious connotations of the original title of Stravinsky's ballet.

Vera, the heroine, associates herself with *The Rite's* Chosen One, as she feels the victim of an unjust destiny. This sentiment is produced by her traumatic experiences of political revolutions, which in turn she associates with 'L'Internationale'. Paul Robeson's performance of this song in Spain during the Civil War appears to initiate a fundamental ideological change in Vera. Her later social-artistic *Rite of Spring* project with Afro-Cuban dancers is fundamental to her conversion, as she becomes sensitive to the racial and economic inequalities of Batista's regime. She finally realises her artistic project during the Cuban Revolution, which she eventually embraces.

*La consagración de la primavera* – perhaps Carpentier's most sincere tribute to the Cuban Revolution – uses Stravinsky's *Rite* to convey not only groundbreaking aesthetic ideas but also triumphant revolutionary political impulses. As a twenty-first century reader, I find it difficult to ignore the historical development of left-wing ideals in the last thirty years, particularly in light of the collapse of socialist regimes beginning with the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the profound ideological crisis that socialist Cuba presently experiences. This is an additional irony that Carpentier could not possibly have foreseen.

There are strong points of convergence in the ways Carpentier deploys music in the texts discussed in this thesis. For him, non-western music validates itself when it generates musical forms. Primeval music is formative in its repetitive invocations, which are structured by means of patterned rhythms. In this music, he sees fundamental impulses responding to inner needs. He also finds these key qualities in Latin American popular music of his time (especially that influenced by African rhythms) and in primitivist pieces by contemporary European composers like Stravinsky and Milhaud. Carpentier realises his analogies with musical time and support for primitivist music through performances, which he often portrays as staged events.

Milhaud's interest in Latin American music, approach to musical form and use of primitivist themes reflect Carpentier's own ideas about these matters well. Milhaud's polytonality, which became the basis from which he built large-scale form, may have been the inspiration for the planned piece of the protagonist of *Los pasos perdidos*. The author's contact with Milhaud may also be related to his understanding of literary form, as he uses contemporary music developments as dynamic models to stimulate the evolution of literary techniques. In both literary and musical works, he strives to find genuine pulses and a disciplined approach to structure.

Carpentier's wide-ranging references to music – as formative, as form and as performed – feature prominently in his quest for origins and artistic identity. He shows a deliberate desire to stress the accuracy of his musical knowledge and challenge that of his readers.

Research for this thesis has identified numerous avenues for future enquiry. The significance of the work of Lydia Cabrera, Jules Combarieu, René Allendy, René Laforgue and Oswald Spengler for Carpentier would be worth exploring in more detail, particularly the application of Spengler's notion of the Faustian to the discussion of musical instruments in his essay 'Los orígenes de la música'. Further analysis of

Carpentier's text may uncover connections with ideas put forward by other researchers who are not directly cited, for instance Fernando Ortiz. Forensic work is required to establish a more exact date of writing, intended audience, reasons why it was never published and possible links with other unpublished documents by Carpentier held by the José Martí Library.

A further project might be to examine Carpentier's 'Los orígenes de la música' alongside his best-known musicological study, *La música en Cuba*. Although this treaty of Cuban musical history does not deal with prehistoric music, it discusses in more detail some aspects of contemporary 'primitive' culture mentioned in the former text, for instance the Afro-Cuban ritual of 'bajar el santo'.<sup>181</sup> It is possible that the argument on ancestral music developed in the unpublished document was initially intended to form part of *La música en Cuba*.<sup>182</sup> 'Los orígenes de la música' precedes another decisive work by Carpentier, the novel *El reino de este mundo* (1949). The comparison of these two texts could bring interesting results, particularly in relation to Carpentier's ethnological research in Haiti which was key to his conceptualisation of 'lo real maravilloso'.

It is notable that in recent years, Carpentier's work has generated interest among musicologists following the 2002 rediscovery of the score of Vivaldi's *Motezuma* (1733), an opera loosely based on the last Aztec emperor's downfall as a result of the Spanish conquest.<sup>183</sup> For instance, Frédéric Delaméa, in his examination of

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<sup>181</sup> References to the ritual of 'bajar el santo' are found in 'Los orígenes de la música', p. 15, and *La música en Cuba*, p. 225 [*Music in Cuba*, p. 261].

<sup>182</sup> In the Preface to *La música en Cuba*, Carpentier notes: 'Mucho podrá añadirse, cuando se haya emprendido, científicamente, el estudio de las raíces africanas de la música del continente (p. 12)' ['Much will be added when scientists undertake the study of the continent's music and its African roots (p. 62)'].

<sup>183</sup> The Aztec ruler is known by several spellings, including Moctezuma, Montezuma, Moteuczoma and Motecuhzoma. Apart from Vivaldi's *Motezuma*, there are other operatic works based on this historical figure: *Montezuma* (1755) by Carl Heinrich Graun, *Motezuma* (1771) by Josef Mysliveček, *Motezuma* (1781) by Niccolò Antonio Zingarelli and *Montezuma* (1963) by Roger Sessions. For a description of Vivaldi's score, see Steffen Voss, 'Die Partitur von Vivaldis Oper *Motezuma* (1733)', *Studi vivaldiani*, 4 (2004), 53-72. Vivaldi's manuscript score was found in the Berliner Singakademie collection, which had been evacuated to Kiev during the Second World War and returned to Berlin in 1999. For details of the reconstructing, editing and recording of this piece, see 'Vivaldi *Motezuma*', in *Deutsche Grammophon*

contemporary revivals of baroque operas, highlights that 'Vivaldi's *Motezuma* for a long time represented an inaccessible El Dorado for modern directors, whose curiosity had been fired by the novelistic evocation of this opera in Alejo Carpentier's *Baroque Concerto* [1974].'<sup>184</sup>

There is no doubt that Carpentier had access to Luigi Giusti's libretto of *Motezuma*, as he quotes excerpts of it in his novella.<sup>185</sup> It is assumed that Vivaldi's score was lost for many years. Given Carpentier's active involvement with the Cuban Revolutionary Government and his frequent trips to the Soviet Bloc, it is not totally implausible that he viewed the manuscript score when it was still held in Kiev. However, in *Concierto barroco* he mentions an instrument which is not part of Vivaldi's scoring: the fife (a small flute). This strongly suggests that the descriptions of the music of *Motezuma* in the novella are not based on the actual score. To my knowledge, studies on *Concierto barroco* published since 2002 do not make any reference to the rediscovery of Vivaldi's score. I believe that an examination of Carpentier's literary allusions to the music of *Motezuma* alongside the newly available original music material may be another avenue to explore.

On the subject of Montezuma, in 2007 I located by coincidence an obscure play by Oswald Spengler entitled *Montezuma: Ein Trauerspiel*. I immediately reported my discovery to Anke Birkenmaier. She is currently preparing a critical edition and a Spanish translation of the play. The original document, which is held by the Bavarian State Library (Munich), is not dated. However, the online record of a copy held by the Ibero-American Institute (Berlin) indicates that the play was 'geschrieben 1896 mit

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(2005) <<http://www.deutsche Grammophon.com/special/?ID=curtis-motezuma>> [accessed 11 August 2010].

<sup>184</sup> Frédéric Delaméa, 'Vivaldi in scena: Thoughts on the Revival of Vivaldi's Operas', in *Vivaldi, Motezuma and the Opera Seria: Essays on a Newly Discovered Work and its Background*, ed. by Michael Talbot (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), pp. 169-85 (p. 169). Other references to Carpentier's *Concierto barroco* in this collection of essays can be found on pp. 2, 5, 28-29, 67, 173, 179.

<sup>185</sup> For a study of Carpentier's use of Giusti's libretto in *Concierto barroco*, see David H. Bost, 'A Night at the Opera: *Concierto barroco* and *Motezuma*', *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos*, 21 (1987), 23-38.

sechzehn Jahren' [written in 1896 at the age of sixteen].<sup>186</sup> Interestingly, Spengler does not include a single mention of Montezuma in his voluminous study of cultures, *The Decline of the West*, despite the fact that this historical figure was the head of a thriving and powerful culture.

I would like to clarify I am not suggesting direct connections between Carpentier's *Concierto barroco*, Spengler's *Montezuma* and Vivaldi's *Moteczuma*. Carpentier's knowledge of Spengler's obscure play is as improbable as Spengler's acquaintance with Vivaldi's little-known opera. It must be noted that there is not a single entry on Vivaldi in *The Decline*. Birkenmaier's forthcoming study of Spengler's *Montezuma* is likely to generate particular interest among scholars working in German and Latin American studies. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Carpentier's application of Spengler's notion of the Faustian to his discussion of primeval music is a new connection of potential importance. Another topic that may bring interesting results is a comparison between Carpentier's views of music history and those of Spengler, particularly their diametrically opposed ideas about contemporary music.

The range of topics for further enquiry that emerge after my examination of Carpentier's use of music indicates that my thesis will make a significant contribution to a number of disciplinary and cross-disciplinary fields of research, and anticipates an exciting array of future projects.

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<sup>186</sup> The original manuscript of Spengler's *Montezuma* lies at the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Spenglers Nachlaß MS - BSB Ana 533 Montezuma. The online record of the Berlin copy is <<http://iaiweb1.iai.spk-berlin.de/DB=1/SET=1/TTL=2/SHW?FRST=1>> [accessed 29 December 2009]. At present, it is not possible to confirm that the date on this record is accurate. The play is centred on the relation between Montezuma and Hernán Cortés. Other characters include Montezuma's son and Cortés's soldiers. The first act takes place in Veracruz. The other four acts are set in the palace of Montezuma in 'Mexico', that is Tenochtitlan.

Una teoría descabellada, que gozó de cierto favor, por un tiempo, en círculos de músicos poco adictos al estudio científico de las cuestiones, afirma que debemos buscar el origen del canto humano, en un afán del hombre primitivo por imitar el canto de las aves. Bernardino de Saint Pierre, con toda buena fe, llegó a decir que Dios, en su infinita bondad, había hecho que las calabazas crecieran a ras de la tierra, y no pendientes de las ramas de un árbol, porque, en este último caso, hubieran podido lesionar a los transeúntes, al caer al suelo. El razonamiento que tiende a establecer que el hombre primitivo tuviese una propensión obsesionante a querer imitar el canto de las aves, me parece del mismo linaje científico que el cándido pensamiento del autor de *Pablo y Virginia* [1788].

Para comenzar, es perfectamente absurdo hablar del canto de las aves. Hay, a la base de esta expresión, un malentendido de orden idiomático. Decimos que el ave *canta*, porque su medio de expresión sonora nos resulta más grato y armonioso que el de otros componentes de la escala zoológica. Pero esto sólo debe a una razón acústica: el ave tiene pico. Y el pico no es más ni menos que un instrumento córneo. Cuando el ave expresa su júbilo o [su] estado [de] celo – ni más ni menos que otros animales –, se produce en su pico el mismo fenómeno físico, que [p. 1] origina el sonido de una flauta, un caramillo, o un oboe. Una columna de aire es puesta en estado de vibración. Tan cierto es esto, que el canto de las aves suena más agudo o más grave, en razón directa de las direcciones [del tamaño] del pico. Sonido muy agudo en un canario, de pico corto. Sonido más aflautado en el sinsonte de pico alargado. Sonido áspero y fuerte en el croar del cuervo. Sonido desagradable y mucho más grave en ciertas aves acuáticas de pico muy largo.

El grito de las aves es tan poco canto, como poco canto es el aullido del perro en la noche, o el relincho del caballo enardecido. El grito de las aves, es expresión sonora de emociones y sensaciones rudimentarias, como lo son todos los de los animales dotados del don de manifestarse de manera audible. La noción de belleza, unida a ese grito, es creación puramente humana; como lo es también la repulsión producida por el aspecto de ciertos reptiles desagradables, pero que, morfológicamente considerados, son tan perfectos y dignos de admiración, como cualquier otro ser viviente.

Es de suponerse que el hombre primitivo no haya visto en el grito de las aves, sino una manifestación más de la vida que lo circundaba. Era un ruido que revelaba la presencia de un ser viviente, como también lo revelaba el croar de las ranas en una charca cercana. No creo que un mono aún perteneciente a especie muy evolucionada, haya sentido nunca, al escuchar a un ruiseñor, la emoción poética de Sigfrido en las selvas del Rhin. Atribuir al hombre prehistórico el don de emocionarse ante un jilguero, es sobrestimar [p. 2] el valor de la condición humana. Y, aún más, creer que ese hombre prehistórico llegara a concebir el pensamiento, muy complejo de por sí, de imitar ese canto para lograr una expresión lírica, casi abstracta, fuera de la palabra. Porque... de qué le hubiera servido esta expresión?... De nada. Luego, el intento presupondría la

<sup>187</sup> 'Los orígenes de la música y la música primitiva' (c.1943), Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, Colección Carpentier, CM 52. This is a nineteen-page typescript written on thin typewriter paper (one side only). This text has not been translated into English before; the following translation is my own. I made no alterations to the grammar in the transcription but some amendments in the translation. In both versions, I standardised Carpentier's inconsistent punctuation. In Chapter Two of this thesis, I propose possible connections with other unpublished texts by Carpentier and explain my reasons for believing it was written around 1943, for a public talk or radio programme.

existencia de una preocupación artística; de un deseo de crear algo gratuito, desprovisto de utilidad, por mero placer.

Ustedes me dirán, desde luego, que las admirables pinturas rupestres de las cuevas de Altamira no responden a otro deseo. Pero debo recordarles que nos estamos situando, en este momento, mucho antes de la aparición del tipo de hombre que pudo trazar siluetas de animales en las paredes de sus cavernas. Nos situamos en la antigüedad vertiginosamente remota en que pudieron producirse las primeras expresiones musicales del hombre.

Curt Sachs, el admirable historiador de los instrumentos musicales, pasa con excesiva rapidez sobre este problema de los orígenes de la música, afirmando – lo cual es exacto! – que toda emoción humana engendra un movimiento, y que ese movimiento es la raíz primera de toda danza. Pero esto nos coloca, una vez más, ante el viejo chiste, opuesto por los librepensadores a los creyentes. “Si existe un reloj, debe haber un relojero”, dicen los creyentes. Pero... “quién hizo al relojero?”, preguntan los ateos. La tesis de Curt Sachs me parece indiscutible en lo que se refiere a la danza. Pero... el canto?... Cuál fue el origen del canto?... [p. 3]

Combarieu – cuya *Historia de la música* [1913-19] sigue siendo un texto de primer orden, a pesar de lagunas considerables –, ve en el canto primero una expresión emocional, provocada por los misterios de la naturaleza, y que cobra, inmediatamente, una forma religiosa y mágica. Su tesis ha sido comprobada por los trabajos de muchos etnógrafos. Pero, sólo es aplicable a un estadio secundario de la música primitiva. Porque... lo importante sería determinar cómo y por qué el hombre ha podido cobrar el hábito singular de expresar sus emociones mediante la emisión de sonidos de una altura desigual. También los animales lo hacen – me responderán ustedes. Pero, esto no explica nada. En el hombre el problema es mucho más complejo, porque con el nacimiento de la música coincide el nacimiento de una civilización material. Y toda civilización material, por rudimentaria que sea, se acompaña de un enriquecimiento del lenguaje. Cuando el hombre talla una piedra de sílex, posee ya una palabra que designa la piedra. Cuando el hombre cava un agujero en la tierra, tiene ya una expresión equivalente a “cavar un agujero en la tierra”. Y es esto mismo lo que nos conduce al punto de partida del problema de la expresión musical.

En su notable ensayo sobre el pensamiento primitivo, los doctores Allendy y Laforgue establecen un cierto número de postulados que invitan a la reflexión [p. 4]. Estudiando la poesía universal, en sus manifestaciones primeras, los doctores Allendy y Laforgue, nos hacen observar que cierto tipo de comparaciones poéticas se hallan en todas las literaturas del mundo, sea cual sea su origen. En las poesías indostánicas, homéricas, hebraicas, finlandesas, se encuentran idénticas imágenes. La mujer amada es siempre comparada con una flor. Sus ojos, con soles y astros, fuentes de luz. Sus dientes son perlas. “El pensamiento primitivo – afirman Allende y Laforgue – ignora la abstracción; todas sus operaciones se traducen en imágenes, cuadros, escenas ... de donde proviene una rapidez en la síntesis, que nunca podría igualar la inteligencia analítica”.

Esta conclusión lleva a Allendy y Laforgue a remontarse a los orígenes del lenguaje. Y nos dicen entonces: “El lenguaje es un simbolismo, en que los sonidos, por una parte, y las imágenes, por otra, tienden a evocar lo que quiere significarse. Es así como los sonidos silbantes, *ji* y *zi*, que recuerdan el ruido del viento que silba, el sonido de un incendio, de un torbellino, de una flecha, expresan la idea del movimiento rápido, de vida, como en las raíces semíticas *ziz*, el sánscrito *jiv*, el griego *zoe*, el ruso *jizn*. Los sonidos graves, como la sílaba *ma*, se refieren generalmente al fundamento de las cosas, a la materia, la masa, la madre, el mar”. Esta observación de Allendy y Laforgue concuerda perfectamente con [...] [p. 5]

Hay pues una propensión, en el hombre primitivo, a designar las cosas rápidas y ligeras, con sonidos ligeros y rápidos, y las cosas fundamentales con sílabas graves y pesadas – lo cual viene a ser, en su esencia, una transposición de la idea sobre el plano de la expresión sonora. A ello, se une, además, una propensión a representar las cosas por una imitación del sonido que estas cosas pueden producir. En los dialectos australianos – que se cuentan entre los más primitivos – la nariz es expresada por un ronquido nasal. Los huesos, por dos sílabas que imitan un entrechocar de huesos. El fuego, por una palabra evocadora del sonido peculiar de las llamas al crecer. En dialecto maorí, se llama al pájaro “tieti”.

La onomatopeya es, pues, uno de los fundamentos del lenguaje humano. Cuando el lenguaje expresa cosas que no encuentran expresión onomatopéyica, el hombre primitivo acude a una transposición sonora, que tiende a unir a una idea de ligereza y rapidez sílabas ligeras, y a una idea de densidad, de fuerza, de fundamento, sílabas ricas y pesadas.

Estos principios son tan inseparables de la esencia misma del lenguaje, que la expresión popular, aún hoy, nos ofrece buenos ejemplos de ello. La característica del habla popular está en la pobreza del léxico, y en la tendencia a suplir el término exacto por una onomatopeya, que brinda ventajas de brevedad y poder de síntesis. Un hombre del pueblo suele decir: “tomó la pistola... y pun!”, [p. 6] “agarró el machete... y zas!”... Al hablar de un ciclón, se verá llevado a imitar el ruido del viento. Al evocar una selva llena de aves, silbará imitativamente. Al mencionar un látigo, imitará su chasquido con la boca. En uno de los *Cuentos negros [de Cuba]* recogidos por Lydia Cabrera [1936], un fuste castigador es representado siempre por una onomatopeya rítmica. Las narraciones que llenan la *Antología negra* [1921] de Cendrars, están repletas de ejemplos parecidos.

A esto hay que añadir, ahora, los ritmos naturales de ciertas expresiones emotivas. El llanto tiene un ritmo. Y también lo tiene la risa. El llanto y la risa tienen su música. Y si tomamos los cantos funerarios más primitivos, observaremos que “oh-ye-ye...oh, la-ye-ye” y las series de “ayes” que acompañan todos los lamentos, en todos los idiomas, no son sino una transposición del llanto primero sobre el plano sonoro.

Estas observaciones nos llevan a la conclusión de que no hubo, realmente, orden de sucesión, entre la palabra y el canto. El canto nació con la palabra. Y la palabra fue, en sus orígenes, una expresión dotada de música, ya por onomatopeya, ya por elección de sonidos simbólicamente representativos, ya por elección instintiva de sílabas dotada de calidad, peso o densidad relacionada con la inicial de las cosas evocadas.

Y ahora, afirmados sobre esta base, podemos situarnos en el estadio secundario de la música primitiva, que es el de la utilización gratuita, con fines no [p. 7] utilitarios, de la palabra. Para la mente primitiva, la repetición de una idea, es necesidad primordial. Para imponer un concepto a un individuo de inteligencia poco desarrollada, hay que repetirlo varias veces. Esto lo vemos aplicado a la educación de los niños. Hay que reiterar una prohibición, formularla durante días y días, para que el niño acabe por adquirir la noción de que tal cosa no debe hacerse. Cuando un hombre primitivo quiere imponer una idea a sus semejantes, recurre a la repetición de esa idea, hasta saturar con ella la memoria de sus oyentes.

De ahí que cuando el hombre primitivo tuvo una obscura sensación de verse rodeado de fuerzas desconocidas, misteriosas, más fuertes que él, quiso invocarlas, por medio del nombre que había creado. Y al gritar el nombre de una divinidad, para invocar su poderío o aplacar su cólera, repitió el grito hasta estimar que había logrado su objeto. Todas las invocaciones son, en esencia, un grito repetido hasta el infinito.

Cuando una palabra se repite durante largo tiempo, su misma emisión vocal acaba por engendrar un ritmo. Ritmo de sus sílabas. Ritmo de la respiración. De ahí que con la primera invocación mágica, naciera ya un género de expresión vocal en el



hombre, dotada de ese factor musicalmente primordial que es el ritmo. Cuando ciertas palabras se repitieron con un ritmo determinado, surgió el canto. El canto, no ya onomatopéyico, sino lírico y expresivo. El canto, tal y como podemos observarlo hoy, en su forma más primitiva, en el folklore de los indios patagones y de ciertas tribus muy atrasadas de Australia. [p. 8]

Muy pronto, el hombre advirtió por instinto que la repetición de una fórmula cantada, o gritada, o ritmada, actúa de modo cierto sobre los centros nerviosos. Hay un proceso de obsesión, que crea en el individuo una extraña euforia – algo que, a la larga, viene a parecerse a una especie de borrachera. De ahí que el hombre atribuyera virtudes extraordinarias a ese extraño fenómeno. Producir el éxtasis, la posesión del sujeto por una fuerza desconocida, comenzó a ser el objeto principal de los ritos primitivos. Por ello, por extensión, se atribuyeron virtudes curativas al canto. En África, en América, existen muchas tribus primitivas en las que se practica una terapéutica musical, consistente en ahuyentar, por medio de cantos, los malos espíritus determinantes de una enfermedad.

En su arte poética [*Poétique musicale*, 1942], Stravinsky, establece este axioma musical: “El contraste es elemento de variedad, pero dispersa la atención. La similitud nace de una tendencia hacia la unidad”. Aplicado al estudio de la música primitiva, este axioma nos explica el carácter monótono de esa música. El hombre primitivo no busca el contraste. Por el contrario, persigue la unidad, por la repetición de una frase. Trabaja en función de la unidad. De ahí, que sus lamentos, invocaciones y encantaciones, estén llenas de fórmulas simétricas, destinadas a ser repetidas hasta el infinito, como ésta, que nos cita Blaise Cendrars, en una de sus tradiciones africanas:

Madre, mi madre, que trabajas lejos.

Koyoko ha devorado a mi hermano solo!... [p. 9]

Este lamento está destinado a repetirse durante horas enteras, con la misma entonación musical.

Y ahora, yo pregunto: acaso la música de occidente no ha heredado de la música primitiva, este afán de hallar la unidad por medio de la repetición de una fórmula?... No conozco compositor alguno que haya tenido la peregrina idea de escribir una obra musical, en que la melodía se desarrolle, sobre sí misma, sin volver atrás, desde el primer compás hasta el último. A qué deben su unidad, formas como el rondó, el allegro sinfónico, el scherzo, sino a la repetición de un tema, que vuelve a escucharse periódicamente, en el mismo o en distinto tono? A qué se refieren las fórmulas de composición musical A.B., AB.C., A.C., sino a repeticiones de temas?... En esto, los hombres primitivos hallaron instintivamente un principio primordial de la construcción sonora, del que nadie ha logrado liberarse hasta ahora.

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Todos los musicólogos están de acuerdo en que el primer instrumento musical utilizado por el hombre fueron sus propias manos. Con sus manos, se habituó a ritmar sus cantos e invocaciones. Con sus manos, golpeadas una contra la otra, o percutiendo en su pecho, o en su vientre. Durante milenios, este fue el único instrumento musical conocido.

Pero, poco a poco, el instinto de la danza, fue creando objetos aptos [par]a producir un sonido rítmico. Como bien lo dice Curt Sachs, toda emoción humana se traduce en un [p. 10] gesto que acompaña el grito de la palabra. Mecánicamente, cuando el hombre comenzó a invocar fuerzas desconocidas, acompañó sus vociferaciones de movimientos corpóreos, que fueron el origen de la danza. A ello se debe que la danza de los pueblos primitivos, tiene muy rara vez el carácter de un acto gratuito. La danza primitiva entraña siempre un rito, debido a su origen mágico y religioso. Esta ley se observa en las danzas guerreras, destinadas a enardecer los hombres que van a entregarse al combate; se observa en las danzas que acompañan las ceremonias de invocación de lluvias, de entrada a la pubertad de las doncellas de la tribu, de acción de

gracia a las fuerzas fecundantes de la naturaleza. Tan fuerte es esta tradición de la danza ritual, que aún se observa su supervivencia en ciertas iglesias de Europa.

Para Curt Sachs, los primeros instrumentos musicales que el hombre haya utilizado eran en realidad objetos que formaban parte de su indumentaria ritual. Pulseras, cinturones, tobilleras, de los que pendían caracoles, semillas, o trocitos de madera, aptos a producir un ruido al moverse el danzarín. En Cuba podemos observar una supervivencia de este tipo de instrumento, en los cencerros que el *diablito ñáñigo* [de la mascarada afrocubana abakúa] lleva colgantes de la cintura y de los tobillos.

La maraca, o sea, la *giira* [fruto tropical] rellena de piedrecitas o semillas que suenan por agitación, se sitúa también en el grupo de instrumentos más primitivos. Pero, más aún que la maraca usada por nuestras orquestas [p. 11] populares, este tipo de *gangarria ñáñiga*, rellena de matas, constituye un instrumento conocido ya en la edad paleolítica.

(instrumento)

La moderna clasificación de instrumentos primitivos, admite cuatro grandes grupos, a saber:

Los idiófonos, o sea, instrumentos en que no intervienen una piel o una cuerda tensa. Entre los idiófonos se cuentan los instrumentos de concusión, del tipo de nuestras *claves* [dos palos de madera]; los instrumentos que suenan por proceso de sacudida, como las *maracas* y *gangarrias*. Y también un tipo de instrumento que se remonta a la noche de las edad[es]: los instrumentos rascados. Entre estos últimos, podemos jactar de poseer un tipo de idiófonos, de los más primitivos y rudimentarios, que el propio Curt Sachs parece desconocer totalmente: la *quijada* [mandíbula].

(instrumento)

El segundo grupo de instrumentos primitivos, es el de los aerófonos. O sea, los instrumentos en que el sonido es producido por efecto del soplo o del viento. La *botija criolla* [vasija de barro], por ejemplo, es un perfecto tipo de aerófono.

El tercer grupo es el de los membranófonos, o sea, instrumentos en que la percusión se ejerce sobre una membrana tensa, o material resonante. A esta familia pertenecen todos los tambores conocidos. (hablar del sistema de tensión del parche o de los parches) [p. 12]

El cuarto y último grupo, es el de los cordófonos, o sea, instrumentos en que el sonido es producido por la vibración de una cuerda tensa. A ese respecto – y Curt Sachs lo ignora también – ha sobrevivido en Cuba, aunque ya es muy raro hallarlo, uno de los cordófonos más singulares y antiguos de la historia humana: la *tumbandera* [o *tingotalango*].

La *tumbandera*, se sitúa en la categoría de las harpas de tierra, que según Sachs, “sólo existen en una región muy pequeña del África Central.” La *tumbandera* consiste en una botija de barro, enterrada en el suelo hasta la boca. Esta boca es recubierta por una piel, como un tambor. De esa piel, sale un largo bejuco en su centro, se obtiene de la *tumbandera* un sonido grave y profundo, de contrabajo.

Vemos, pues, que no nos mueve una simple curiosidad erudita, al estudiar la música primitiva. Cuba es la tierra de elección para este tipo de investigaciones, ya que la *quijada*, la *tumbandera*, la *marímbula* [compuesta de plectros metálicos], las *claves*, la *botija*, constituyen casos rarísimos de supervivencia de los primeros instrumentos conocidos por el hombre.

El orden de aparición de los instrumentos primitivos puede ser establecido con precisión, debido a los descubrimientos hechos en excavaciones [arqueológicas]. En las excavaciones en estratos paleolíticos, sólo se advierte la presencia de idiófonos y aerófonos. (Entre estos últimos sólo aparece una flauta sin agujeros, hecha de hueso)

En el estrato intermedio, o neolítico, aparece un [p. 13] aerófono que conocemos en Cuba: la trompeta hecha con una concha de gran tamaño. A esa época pertenece también la *tumbandera*, y las primeras familias de tambores.

Finalmente, en excavaciones realizadas en estratos más recientes, se encuentran instrumentos de tipo xilofónico, *marugas* [conos rellenos de piedrecillas o semillas] de paja trenzada, del tipo de la que acaban ustedes de ver, y flautas transversales.

Tenemos, pues, en Cuba, instrumentos de origen paleolítico y neolítico, del más alto interés. Instrumentos que tienen veinticinco mil años de historia!...

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El hecho de que los instrumentos de percusión fuesen los primeros hallados por el hombre – lo que era lógico, ya que una trompeta de barro o de madera, por ejemplo, exigía la presencia de una civilización material más desarrollada – hizo que las familias de percutores se enriquecieran con relativa rapidez, aventajando a las demás en variedad y recursos. Por ello, las músicas primitivas evolucionaron principalmente en el sentido rítmico, relegando la melodía al segundo plano.

Pero un hecho de orden espiritual intervenía también en ello: y es que el hombre primitivo – aceptando la terminología de Spengler [en *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, 1918-22] –, es hombre fáustico por esencia. Una civilización de tipo apolíneo, como la griega, tenía, por fuerza, que evolucionar hacia la melodía, elemento definido y claro, lineal y equilibrado, propiciador de orden y conocimiento. Por el trujamán del espíritu griego, nos llega toda nuestra música occidental, que [p. 14] alcanza, en la clara polifonía renacentista, la suprema expresión de lo apolíneo. Pueblos de místicos y de magos, de profetas y hechiceros, de invocadores y auguras, tenían que ser llevados, forzosamente, por la índole fáustica de su espíritu, hacia el mundo, infinitamente misterioso, del ritmo.

Yo les hablaba, hace un momento, de la acción del ritmo sobre los centros nerviosos del organismo. Sin ser médico ni biólogo, puedo afirmar que dicha acción es evidente y poderosa. Dejando de lado un mundo de mixtificaciones inevitables, el fenómeno del “estado de posesión” logrado por medio de la repetición obsesionante de un ritmo, es cosa absolutamente comprobada. Lo que llamamos en Cuba “bajar el santo” es fenómeno psíquico-físico de los más curiosos. (Describir la ceremonia del Oleli. Hablar del Houngan [sacerdote] Abraham)

El cultivo de la percusión y de sus recursos por parte de los pueblos llamados primitivos, es tradición recibida y mantenida por casi todos los pueblos del África, y no pocos pueblos del Asia. Y, desde este punto de vista, debe reconocerse que los asiáticos han llegado mucho más lejos que nosotros, en el dominio de los instrumentos de percusión. Nuestras pobres orquestas sinfónicas tradicionales, sólo disponen, en cuanto a [p. 15] instrumentos de esta índole, de pobrísimos elementos, de una torpeza y mal sonido, que harían reír a un músico balinés por ejemplo. El único percutor que ofrece una afinación exacta es el timbal... En cambio, oigamos una prodigiosa instrumentación de tambores, lograda por músicos indostánicos. Se trata de un “raga”, tocado a doce tambores, por el conjunto Uday Shan-Kar...

#### Disco 1 ---

En Haití, laborando con el Museo de Etnografía de Port-au-Prince, he tenido oportunidad de hacer muy curiosas observaciones acerca de un sistema rítmico afro-americano, que me era, lo confieso, absolutamente desconocido. Yo había trabajado ya, con Amadeo Roldán, sobre los ritmos ñañigos, y había investigado acerca de los tambores *batás* [usados en rituales afrocubanos]. Pero Haití me reveló un mundo de ritmos nuevos. Quiero hacerles escuchar algunos de los discos de música vaudou [sic], grabados por mí mismo, en el transcurso de mi reciente viaje a la vecina república. Observen ustedes, sobre todo, la prodigiosa riqueza de los tres tambores que acompañan el canto estático y primitivo de las voces.

#### Disco I.

Con toda su ciencia, los compositores modernos que más han trabajado con la percusión, están muy lejos de haber alcanzado este frenesí rítmico, ese latido de los tambores que hace correr una sangre generosa y rica, debajo de la expresión puramente invocatoria.

Pero ahora escucharemos un canto de muy distinta índole. Se trata de una canción de trabajo, entonado [p. 16] en una plantación de maíz, donde los campesinos ritman su labor con la música... Como oirán ustedes, esta vez el tambor se hace funcional, marcando el ritmo de la acción, y avanzando hacia una aceleración final del tempo, destinada a apresurar el trabajo del grupo. Henry Ford no hubiese encontrado nada más ingenioso.

#### Disco G.

Para el hombre de Asia y del África, un tambor es mucho más que un simple instrumento de percusión. Los hombres de esos continentes han imaginado utilidades de los elementos rítmicos, a los que permanecemos absolutamente ajenos. El asiático nos cuenta historias enteras, superponiendo modos rítmicos. Tiene un “modo de la tempestad”, un “modo del ave”, un “modo de la primavera”, un “modo del mar”, que forman parte de la cultura colectiva. El africano, por su parte, se sirve de sus tambores a modo de telégrafo, enviando con sus percusiones mensajes a distancia. De tribu en tribu, se dan órdenes y se reciben noticias, por la voz de los tambores. Y aún subsiste la gran tradición, hija de las edades primitivas, consistente en acompañar la labor de los campos, con ritmos y coplas.

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Qué influencia ha tenido sobre la música de occidente, la música primitiva?... Una influencia enorme, extraordinaria, en estos últimos lustros. Así como los pintores descubrieron, a principios de este siglo, el poder de síntesis y el soberano sentido de la expresión del arte [p. 17] africano y polinesio, los compositores se alimentaron de música primitiva – es decir: de sus principios rítmicos – durante más de diez años.

Poulenc, con su *Rapsodia Negra* [1917, rev. 1933]; Milhaud, con *El hombre y su deseo* [1918] y *La creación del mundo* [1923]; Villa-Lobos, con sus doce [catorce] *Choros* [1920-29] y su *Noneto* [1923], han vuelto de sus incursiones al África, a las selvas del Amazonas, a los cabarets de Harlem, con las manos llenas. Muchos hallaron en el jazz una supervivencia evidente de los grandes principios que rigen la música primitiva. Cómo explicar este fragmento del segundo episodio de *La consagración [de la] primavera* de Stravinsky [1913], sino por un deseo de remontarse a las fuentes primeras de toda música?

#### Disco: *Sacre*

Pero la música contemporánea nos ofrece una realización más singular e interesante aún en este dominio. Partiendo de un principio tan antiguo como el hombre, Darius Milhaud, al escribir los coros de su *Orestíada* [1913-23], quiso enfocar el problema de una manera absolutamente nueva. El compositor pensó que era posible escribir páginas vocales, confiando a la voz – como en las invocaciones primeras – una simple declaración rítmica, hablada, gritada, y vociferada. A la percusión sola fue confiada la labor de apoyar la expresión humana, marcando sus secuencias, e imponiéndole un ritmo. Debe reconocerse que Milhaud logró el intento con esplendorosa eficiencia musical. He aquí este fragmento antológico, ejecutado por la Coral de Amberes.

#### Disco: Milhaud. [p. 18]

Sentado el precedente, Milhaud hizo uso de estos procedimientos en su gigantesca ópera *Cristóbal Colón* [1928], y otras partituras, entre las cuales se cuenta una serie de *Invocaciones* vocales [1939], escritas en colaboración con quien ahora les habla.

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Párrafo sobre el Museo de Etnografía de Haití.

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La supervivencia de una música primitiva – al estado puro, evolucionada, degenerada o sincréticamente modificada – en ciertas regiones de nuestro globo, es herencia del pasado que debemos conservar a toda costa. No sólo, porque la música primitiva encierra reales y verdaderas bellezas de ritmo y melodía, sino porque en ella se encuentra la clave de una serie de problemas etnológicos, semánticos y psicológicos, destinados a ser, por muchos siglos aún, objetos de investigaciones por parte de la cultura occidental!... [p. 19]

## 'The Origins of Music and Primitive Music'

An absurd theory, which for a while had some support in musical circles detached from scientific studies of these matters, states that we should look for the origin of human singing in primitive man's urge to imitate birdsong. Bernardin de Saint Pierre, in all good faith, came to the conclusion that God, in his infinite goodness, had made pumpkins grow on the ground rather than hang from the branches of a tree, because in the latter case, they could have injured passers-by when falling to the ground. It seems to me that the reasoning that suggests that primitive man had an obsessive inclination to want to imitate birdsong to share the same scientific lineage with the naïve thinking of the author of *Paul et Virginie* [1788].

To begin with, it is perfectly absurd to talk about birdsong. There is, at the heart of this expression, a misunderstanding of a linguistic order. We say that the bird *sings* because its means of sonic expression is more pleasant and harmonious to us than that of other members of the zoological scale. But this is only due to an acoustic reason: the bird has a beak. And the beak is just a corneous instrument. When the bird expresses its joy or is on heat – just as with other animals – the same physical phenomenon occurs in its beak as that which produces the sound of a flute, pipes or oboe. An air column is set into vibration. This is so true that birdcalls sound higher or lower in pitch in direct ratio to the length of the beak. A very high-pitched sound in a canary with a short beak; a more fluty sound in the mockingbird with a long beak. A harsh and loud sound in the crow's croak. An unpleasant and much lower sound in certain aquatic birds with very long beaks.

Birdcalls are no more singing than the howling of a dog in the night, or the neighing of an excited horse. Birdcalls are sonic expressions of rudimentary emotions and feelings just like all those of animals endowed with the gift of manifesting themselves in an audible way. The notion of beauty, attached to this call, is a purely human creation, as is the repulsion produced by certain unpleasant reptiles, which, when considered morphologically, are as perfect and worthy of admiration as any other living being.

It can be assumed that primitive man did not consider birdcalls as anything other than another sign of surrounding life. It was noise that revealed the presence of a living being, as was the croaking of frogs in a pond nearby. I do not believe that a monkey, still belonging to a very evolved species, would ever have felt, while listening to a nightingale, the poetic emotion of Siegfried in the Rhine woods. To attribute prehistoric man with the gift of being moved by a goldfinch is to overestimate the value of the human condition. As it would be, even more, to believe that prehistoric man could have devised the thought, very complex in itself, of imitating that bird's call to achieve a lyric expression, almost abstract, beyond words. Because... what use would he have made of this expression? None. Attempting it would presuppose the existence of an artistic concern, of a desire to create something gratuitous, devoid of use, for mere pleasure.

It might be objected, of course, that the admirable cave paintings of Altamira suggest no other purpose. But I must remind you that now we are placing ourselves long before the rise of the type of man who was able to draw animal silhouettes on the walls of his caves. We are placing ourselves in the far-off past when man's first musical expressions could have taken place.

Curt Sachs, the admirable historian of musical instruments, goes over the issue of the origin of music too quickly, stating – which is right! – that any human emotion generates a movement, and that movement is the originating impulse towards every dance. But this takes us back, once again, to the old joke, posed by freethinkers to

believers. 'If there is a clock, there must be a clockmaker', believers say. But... 'Who made the clockmaker?', ask atheists. Curt Sachs's thesis regarding dance seems unquestionable to me. But... singing?... What was the origin of singing?...

Combarieu – whose *Histoire de la musique* [1913-19] continues to be a first-rate text, in spite of considerable gaps – sees in primeval singing an emotional expression caused by the mysteries of nature, and one that immediately takes on a religious and magical form. His thesis has been confirmed by the works of many ethnographers. Yet it is only applicable to a secondary stage of primitive music. Because... the important thing would be to determine how and why man has been able to acquire the singular habit of expressing his emotions through sonic emissions of uneven pitch. Animals do so too – it might be said. But this does not explain anything. The problem is far more complex in man, because the rise of music coincides with the rise of material civilisation. And every material civilisation, however rudimentary it may be, entails an enrichment of language. When a man carves a piece of flint, he already has a name for the stone. When a man digs a hole in the ground he already has an expression equivalent to 'digging a hole in the ground'. The same observation leads us to the question of the origins of musical expression.

Dr Allendy and Dr Laforgue, in their outstanding essay on early thinking, establish a number of postulates that invite reflection. In their study of universal poetry in its early manifestations, Dr Allendy and Dr Laforgue draw our attention to the fact that certain types of poetic comparison appear in all world literatures, whatever their origin. In Hindustani, Homeric, Hebraic, Finnish poetries, identical images are found. The beloved woman is always compared with a flower. Her eyes, with suns and stars, sources of light. Her teeth are pearls. 'Primitive thinking', assert Allendy and Laforgue, 'ignores abstraction; all its functions translate into images, pictures, scenes ... which results in a fast synthesis that could never equate an analytic intelligence'.

This conclusion leads Allendy and Laforgue to go back to the origins of language. And then they tell us: 'Language is a symbolic system, in which sounds, on the one hand, and images, on the other, tend to evoke the desired meaning. Thus it is that the whistling sounds *Ji* and *Zi*, which are reminiscent of the noise of the whistling wind, the sound of a fire, of a whirlwind, of an arrow, express the idea of fast movement, of life, as in the Semitic root *ziz*, the Sanskrit *jiv*, the Greek *zoe*, the Russian *jizn*. Low-pitch sounds, such as the syllable *ma*, generally refer to the basis of things, to the matter, the mass, the maternal, the marine.' This observation by Allendy and Laforgue perfectly agrees with [...]

There is thus a tendency, in primitive man, to name light and transient things with light and fast sounds, and fundamental things with heavily stressed and weighty syllables – which is, in essence, a transposition of the idea onto the level of sonic expression. In addition to this, there is a tendency to represent things through an imitation of the sound which these things can produce. In Australian dialects – which are among the most primitive ones – nose is expressed by a nasal snoring. Bones, by two syllables that imitate a collision between bones. Fire, by a word evoking the peculiar sound of flames growing upward. In Maori dialect, a bird is called 'tieti'.

Onomatopoeia is thus one of the fundamentals of human language. When language expresses things that cannot find onomatopoetic expression, primitive man turns to a sonic transposition that tends to combine an idea of levity and speed with light syllables, and an idea of gravity, strength and the fundamental with rich and heavy syllables.

These principles are so inseparable from the very essence of language, of which popular expression, even today, offers us good examples. A feature of popular speech is the poverty of vocabulary and the tendency to replace the exact term by an onomatopoeia, which gives advantages of brevity and power of synthesis. A

countryman usually says: 'he took the pistol...and bang!', 'he grasped the machete...and smack!'...When talking about a cyclone, he will be inclined to imitate the sound of wind. When evoking a forest full of birds, he will whistle in an imitative way. When mentioning a whip, he will imitate its click with his mouth. In one of the *Cuentos negros* [de Cuba, 1936] collected by Lydia Cabrera, a punishing whip is always represented by a rhythmic onomatopoeia. The narratives of Cendrars's *Anthologie nègre* [1921] are full of similar examples.

To this, one now has to add the natural rhythms of certain emotional expressions. Weeping has a rhythm. And so too does laughing. Weeping and laughing have their music. And if we consider the most primitive funeral songs, we shall observe that 'oh – ye – ye... oh, la – ye – ye' and the series of 'ayes' that go with all laments, in every language, are nothing other than a transposition of the primitive sound of weeping.

These observations lead to the conclusion that in reality, neither speech nor song came first. Singing was born with speaking. And speech was, in its origins, an expression gifted with music, either by onomatopoeia, by the choice of symbolically representative sounds, or by an instinctual choice of syllables based on the quality, weight or density related to the initial [sounds] of the things evoked.

And now, on this basis, we are able to place ourselves in the secondary stage of primitive music, which is one of gratuitous purpose, without a utilitarian use of words. For the primitive mind, the repetition of an idea is a fundamental need. In order to impose a concept to an individual of little-developed intelligence, it is necessary to repeat it several times. We see this applied to children's education. We have to reiterate a prohibition, to say it day after day, so that the child finally acquires the notion that such a thing must not be done. When a primitive man wants to impose an idea to his fellow men, he resorts to the repetition of that idea, until he saturates the memory of his audience with it.

Thus, when primitive man felt an obscure feeling of being surrounded by unknown and mysterious forces, stronger than himself, he wanted to invoke them through the name he had created. And by shouting the name of the divinity to invoke its power or placate its rage, he repeated the cry until he felt he had achieved his purpose. All invocations are basically a cry repeated infinitely.

When a word is repeated for a long time, its vocal emission itself ends up generating a rhythm. A rhythm of its syllables. A rhythm of breathing. From there, with the first magic invocation, a genre of vocal expression in man would spring up, endowed with this musically fundamental factor, rhythm. When certain words were repeated with a certain rhythm, singing was born. Singing, not onomatopoeic but lyric and expressive. Singing, exactly as we can observe it nowadays, in its most primitive form, in the folk tradition of the Patagonian natives and of certain very underdeveloped tribes from Australia.

Very soon, primitive man realised by instinct that the repetition of a shouted, sung, or rhymed formula truly acts on the nervous system. There is a process of obsession, which creates a strange euphoria in the individual – something that, in the long term, is akin to a sort of drunkenness. From then, man ascribed extraordinary virtues to that strange phenomenon. To produce ecstasy, the possession of the subject by an unknown force, became the main aim of primitive rites. That is why, by extension, curative virtues were attributed to singing. In Africa, in the Americas, there are many primitive tribes who practise musical therapy, consisting of frightening away, by means of songs, the bad spirits that cause an illness.

In his *Poétique musicale* [1942], Stravinsky proposes this musical axiom: 'Contrast is an element of variety, but it divides our attention. Similarity is born of a striving for unity'. Applied to the study of primitive music, this axiom explains to us the



monotonous character of that music. Primitive man does not seek contrast. On the contrary, he pursues unity, by means of the repetition of a sentence. He works according to unity. That is why his laments, invocations and enchantments are full of symmetrical formulas, intended to be repeated infinitely, as this one, quoted by Blaise Cendrars in one of his [texts of] African traditions:

Mother, my mother, you work far away.  
Koyoko has devoured my sole brother!...

This lament is destined to be repeated for many hours, with the same musical intonation.

And now, I wonder: hasn't Western music inherited from primitive music this urge to achieve unity through the repetition of a formula?... I do not know any composer who has had the odd idea of writing a musical work in which the melody develops, without going back, from the first to the last bar. Where does unity in forms such as rondo, symphonic allegro [and] scherzo come from, but from the repetition of a theme which is periodically heard in the same or in a different key? What do compositional formulas, such as AB, ABC, AC, refer to but to the repetition of themes?... In this, primitive man instinctively found an essential principle of musical construction, which nobody has been able to get rid of so far.

-----  
All musicologists agree that the first musical instrument used by man was his own hands. With his hands, he got used to rhyming his songs and invocations. With his hands, clapping against each other or hitting his chest or belly. For millennia, this was the only known musical instrument.

However, gradually, the instinct to dance was creating objects suitable for generating rhythmic sound. As Curt Sachs rightly says, every human emotion becomes a gesture that accompanies the cry of words. Mechanically, when man began to invoke unknown forces, he accompanied his vociferations with body movements which became the origin of dance. This is why primitive people's dance rarely has the character of a gratuitous act. Primitive dance always implies a rite, due to its origin in magic and religion. This rule is seen in warlike dances, aimed to arouse men who go to combat; it is observed in dances accompanying ceremonies of invocation of rain, of tribal maidens beginning their puberty, of thanksgiving to fertility forces of nature. So strong is this tradition of ritual dance, that survivals can still be observed in certain European churches.

According to Curt Sachs, the first musical instruments used by man were actually objects belonging to his ritual attire: bracelets, belts, [and] anklets, from which hung shells, seeds or small pieces of wood, suitable for producing a sound as the dancer moves around. In Cuba, we can still observe this kind of instrument, in the rattles that the *diablito ñáñigo* [from the Afro-Cuban Abakúa masquerade tradition] wears hanging from his waist and ankles.

The maracas, or the *güira* [tropical fruit], filled with little stones or seeds that make a sound when shaken, are also considered among the most primitive instruments. But, apart from the maracas used by our popular orchestras, this type of *gangarria ñáñiga* [a brass instrument], filled with plants, is an instrument already known in the Paleolithic age.

The modern classification of early instruments admits four large groups, as follows:

Idiophones, that is, instruments in which a tensed skin or string does not intervene. Among idiophones are struck instruments, of the same kind as our *claves* [hardwood dowels]; the instruments that sound through shaking, such as the maracas, and the *gangarrías*. And also a sort of instrument that goes back to the dawn of time: the strummed instruments. Among the latter, we can be proud of having one of the

oldest and most rudimentary types of idiophones, of which Curt Sachs seems to be totally unaware: the *quijada* [a jawbone].

(instrument)

The second group of early instruments is that of aerophones. That is, the instruments where the sound is produced by the effect of blowing or the wind. For example, the local *botija* [an earthenware jug] is a perfect type of aerophone.

The third group is that of membranophones, that is, instruments where percussion is exerted over a tense membrane, or resonant material. All known drums belong to this family.

(talk about the tension system of the patch or the patches).

The fourth and last group is that of chordophones, that is, instruments where sound is produced by the vibration of a tense string. Within this group – and also unknown to Curt Sachs – one of the most singular and oldest chordophones in human history, the *tumbandera* [or *tingotalango*], has survived in Cuba, although it is very difficult to find it now. The *tumbandera* is situated in the category of ground harps, which, according to Sachs, ‘only exists in a very small region of Central Africa.’ The *tumbandera* consists of an earthenware vessel, buried underground up to the mouth. This mouth is covered by a skin, as a drum. From the centre of that skin, comes out a long liana, [from which] a deep, low sound of a double bass is produced.

Thus, we see that we are not moved just by a simple erudite curiosity of studying primitive music. Cuba is the land of choice for this type of research, since the *quijada*, the *tumbandera*, the *marímbula* [composed of plucked metal blades], the *claves*, the *botija*, represent very rare survival cases of the earliest instruments known to man.

The order of appearance of primitive instruments can be established with precision, due to discoveries made in [archaeological] excavations. In excavations of Palaeolithic layers, only the presence of idiophones and aerophones can be observed (among the latter, only a flute without holes, made of bone, appears).

In the next layer, corresponding to the Neolithic period, appears an aerophone we know in Cuba: the conch, a trumpet made from a large shell. The *tumbandera* and the earliest families of drums also belong to that period.

Finally, in excavations from more recent layers, there are xylophone-type instruments, *marugas* [cones containing pebbles or seeds] of plaited straw, similar to those you have just seen, and transverse flutes. We have, thus, in Cuba, instruments of Palaeolithic and Neolithic origin, of the greatest interest. Instruments which have twenty-five thousand years of history!

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The fact that percussion instruments were the first developed by man – which was logical, since an earthenware or wooden trumpet, for example, demanded the presence of a more developed material civilisation – made families of percussion instruments prosper relatively quickly, surpassing others in variety and means. For that reason, primitive music evolved mainly in the rhythmic sense, relegating melody to second place.

But a fact of a spiritual order also took part in this: primitive man is – to adopt Spengler’s terminology [in *The Decline of the West*, 1918-22] – Faustian in essence. An Apollonian-type civilisation, like the Greek, had perforce to evolve towards melody, a definite and clear element, linear and balanced, propitiator of order and knowledge. The spirit of the Greeks has acted as mediator, bringing us the whole of our Western music, reaching in the clear polyphony of the Renaissance the supreme expression of the Apollonian. The world of mystics and magicians, of prophets and shamans, of conjurors and omens, could only be carried, because of the Faustian nature of their spirit, towards the world, infinitely mysterious, by mere rhythm.

I was telling you, a moment ago, about the effect of rhythm upon the nervous centres of the body. Without being a physician or biologist, I can assert that such influence is evident and powerful. Leaving aside a world of inevitable mystifications, the phenomenon of the 'state of possession' attained through the obsessive repetition of a rhythm is something absolutely proven. It is a most curious psycho-physical phenomenon which in Cuba we call 'bajar el santo' [to bring down the saint]. (Describe the Oleli ceremony. Talk about the Houngan [priest] Abraham)

The practice of percussion and its uses by people called primitives is a tradition received and maintained by almost all African peoples and no few Asian peoples. And, from this point of view, it should be recognised that Asians have gone much further than us, in the domain of percussion instruments. In respect of this kind of instrument, our poor traditional symphonic orchestras contain only very poor examples, of such awkwardness and bad sound that would make, for example, a musician from Bali laugh. The sole percussion instrument that offers an accurate tuning are the timpani... On the other hand, let's listen to a prodigious orchestration of drums, played by Hindustani musicians. It is a 'raga', performed on twelve drums, by the Uday Shan-Kar ensemble...

#### Record 1 ---

In Haiti, working with the Bureau National d'Ethnologie d'Haïti in Port-au-Prince, I have had the chance of making very curious observations about an Afro-American rhythmic system, which was, I admit, completely unknown to me. I had already been working with Amadeo Roldán on *ñáñigo* rhythms, and I had done research on *batá* drums [used in Afro-Cuban rituals]. But Haiti revealed to me a world of new rhythms. I want you to listen to some recordings of voodoo music, recorded by myself, during my recent trip to our neighbouring republic. Observe, in particular, the prodigious richness of the three drums which accompany the monotonous and primitive singing.

#### Record I.

With all their science, the modern composers who have most worked with percussion are very far from achieving this rhythmic frenzy, that beat of drums that makes generous and rich blood flow beneath the purely invocatory expression.

But now we shall listen to a chant of a very different nature. It is a work-song sung in a maize plantation, where the peasants match their labour with music... As you will hear, this time the drum sound becomes functional, marking the rhythm of the action, and moving forwards towards a final acceleration of the tempo, designed to speed up the work of the group. Henry Ford would not have found anything more ingenious.

#### Record G.

For a man from Asia or Africa, a drum is much more than a simple percussion instrument. Men of those continents have imagined uses of rhythmic elements which are completely alien to us. The Asian man tells us complete stories, superimposing rhythmic modes. He has a 'tempest mode', a 'bird mode', a 'spring mode', a 'sea mode', which take part in the collective culture. The African man, for his part, makes use of his drums like a telegraph, sending long-distance messages with his rhythms. From one tribe to another, they give orders and receive news, through the voice of drums. And it still carries on the great tradition, going back to primitive times, consisting of accompanying rural labour with rhythm and song.

-----  
What influence has primitive music had on Western music?... An enormous, extraordinary influence in these last lustrums. In the same way as painters discovered, at the beginning of this [the twentieth] century, the power of synthesis and the sovereign sense of expression of African and Polynesian art, composers have fed themselves from primitive music – that is, from its rhythmical principles – for more than ten years.

Poulenc, with his *Rapsodie nègre* [1917, rev. 1933]; Milhaud, with his *L'homme et son désir* [1918] and *La création du monde* [1923], Villa-Lobos, with his twelve [fourteen] *Chôros* [1920-29] and his *Noneto* [1923], have returned from their trips to Africa, to the Amazon rainforests, to Harlem cabarets, full of ideas. Many of them found in jazz a definite survival of the great principles that rule primitive music. How can one explain this passage from the second part of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* [1913] but as a wish to return to the earliest sources of all music?

Record: *Rite*

But contemporary music offers us an even more singular and interesting example executed in this realm. Using a principle as old as man, Darius Milhaud, when writing the chorus lines of his *Oresteia* [1913-23], decided to look at the problem in a totally new way. The composer had the idea of notating vocal parts, giving the voice – as in early invocations – simply rhythmic speech, shouts and yells. The task of supporting this human expression was assigned to percussion alone, marking its sequences and imposing a rhythm upon it. It must be recognised that Milhaud achieved his purpose with splendid musical effectiveness. Here is this anthological fragment, performed by the Anvers Choir.

Record: Milhaud.

Having set this precedent, Milhaud made use of these procedures in his gigantic opera *Christophe Colomb* [1928] and in other scores, among which there is a series of vocal *Invocations* [1939], written in collaboration with myself.

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Paragraph about the Bureau National d'Ethnologie d'Haïti.

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The survival of primitive music – in unadulterated state, evolved, degenerated or modified by syncretism – in certain regions of the world, is an inheritance of the past which we should preserve at any price. Not just because primitive music contains true and real beauties of rhythm and melody, but because in it one finds the key for a series of ethnological, semantic and psychological problems, which are bound to be, for many centuries yet, research topics of Western culture!...

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